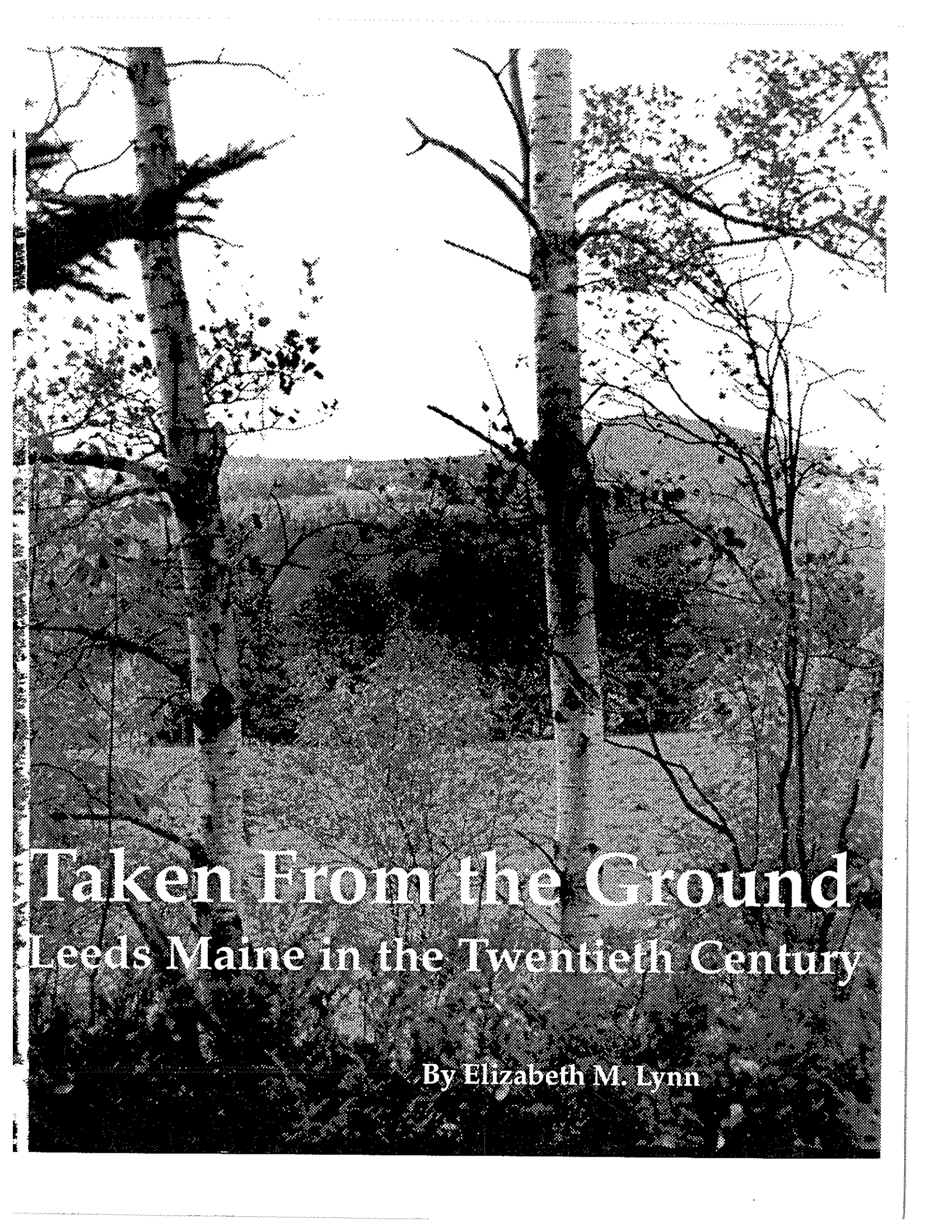




Taken From the Ground

Leeds Maine in the Twentieth Century

By Elizabeth M. Lynn

TAKEN FROM THE GROUND

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Elizabeth Mitchell Lynn
1989

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*You shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow
until you return to the ground;
for from it you were taken.*

Genesis 3:19

DEDICATED
TO

CHARLES BARKER, TEACHER

CARL GEORES, LEADER

CARROLL EDWIN MORRIS, STORYTELLER

LOUISE SANDERS, NEIGHBOR

EDSON WAITE, DREAMER

TAKEN FROM THE GROUND

CONTENTS

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
Prologue	xv
Chronology of Leeds History	xvii
Map of Leeds	xix

PART ONE The Lay of the Land

1. Geography	3
2. Transportation	17
3. Neighborhoods	33

PART TWO The Ways of the People

4. Work	65
5. Community	99
Parties of Hope: 1901	103
State of Siege: 1901-1950	119
A New Vision: 1950—1980	140

<i>Contributors</i>	157
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<i>Bibliography</i>	159
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Two generous grants from the Monks Foundation and a Youthgrant from the National Endowment for the Humanities enabled me to devote eighteen months to the research and writing this book. To Robert Monks, who gave me that first crucial benefit of the doubt, and to Glenn Marcus, my very human contact at NEH, I am especially grateful. Karen Bowdoin of the Maine Humanities Council was kind and encouraging; she also did the great service of introducing me to James Leamon, Professor of History at Bates College. Jim, who served as my formal and informal advisor throughout the project, deserves credit for what little coherence this book may have. To him, I can only give thanks for all his unerringly good advice—and apologies for being too stubborn to follow all of it.

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Finally, to my publisher Mike Gunason, who brought this book to light —

And to my parents Robert and Katharine Lynn, who brought me to light—

The mistakes—all mine.

The magic—Leeds'—and thine.

Elizabeth Lynn
1989

PROLOGUE

EVERY ERA HAS ITS EDEN: a time past when life was simpler and people more satisfied, a time of solid values, strong families, and certain faith. For present-day Leeds, Maine, that Eden was turn-of-the-century Leeds, when the town was still a community of small family farms. Then, no one had yet eaten the apple of affluence. Then, "everybody was poor but a heck of a lot happier." Then, the selectman, teachers and doctors of the town were more dedicated: "they had to be, because there wasn't any money in it." Then, people were more of a family, and families took care of their own, and children were brought up according to strict Christian principles.

If the residents of turn-of-the-century Leeds were living in Eden, however, they did not seem to know it. On August 15, 1901, the town held a Centennial Celebration in honor of its hundredth birthday—and the speeches given that summer day spoke neither of simplicity nor satisfaction, but of rapid material change and a hunger for more. In the words of its own witnesses, 1901 was a time of "modern machinery and modern progress," of "minds deeply engrossed with the thought of obtaining the almighty dollar." And Leeds was a town of alarming extravagance, "with its railroad and telegraph, with its facilities for talking with people in Boston and New York, with its shops and mills, with its citizens riding in good carriages." It was a time, and Leeds was a town, of morals menaced by the temptations of affluence: already the menace had made headway, leaving "broken family circles," "old farms deserted," and churches silent on Sunday mornings while the streets wore "the appearance of a holiday." The Leeds of 1901, like the Leeds of today, had its own Eden to invoke—but its Eden was set at the turn of an earlier century, in 1801, the era of settlement. Then, as the Centennial speakers reminded their audience, "wants were few and habits simple." Then, "a set and simple faith" had been sustenance enough. The settlers, sprung from Puritan stock, "had imbibed principles of morality and integrity" with their mothers' milk. They, in turn, had taught their own children to fear God and keep his commandments; and every Sunday morning, back in 1801, these families could have been seen "wending their way to church to listen to two long sermons."

Had the settlers been in that Centennial Celebration audience of 1901, they undoubtedly would have been astonished to hear themselves described as saints and their world described as simple. As settler Thomas Francis remembered those early years, "the inhabitants were wholly inattentive to their eternal concerns," filled their Sundays with "carnal amusements and recreations," and "knew little of the Scripture." If they imbibed anything, it was not principles of Puritan morality but decidedly un-Puritan quantities of rum: a local historian later wrote, "Leeds, in those days, was not, strictly, a temperance town." Thomas Francis, one of the town's first converts to Christianity, worked hard to rectify the situation, but he never quite succeeded in bringing to pass his own Eden, the New Jerusalem. The residents of the town soon strayed from the path of righteousness, into dens of iniquity and dreams of gold. Their children strayed even further, often leaving Leeds altogether, in search of another promised land—or, simply, more promising land. The world the settlers carved in the wilderness, with its feuding churches, its frequented rum shops, and its families scattered to the four winds, speaks for itself. This was not a world created by people whose wants were few and habits simple. It was a world whittled by restless hands, by people with a passion for things done and seen newly.

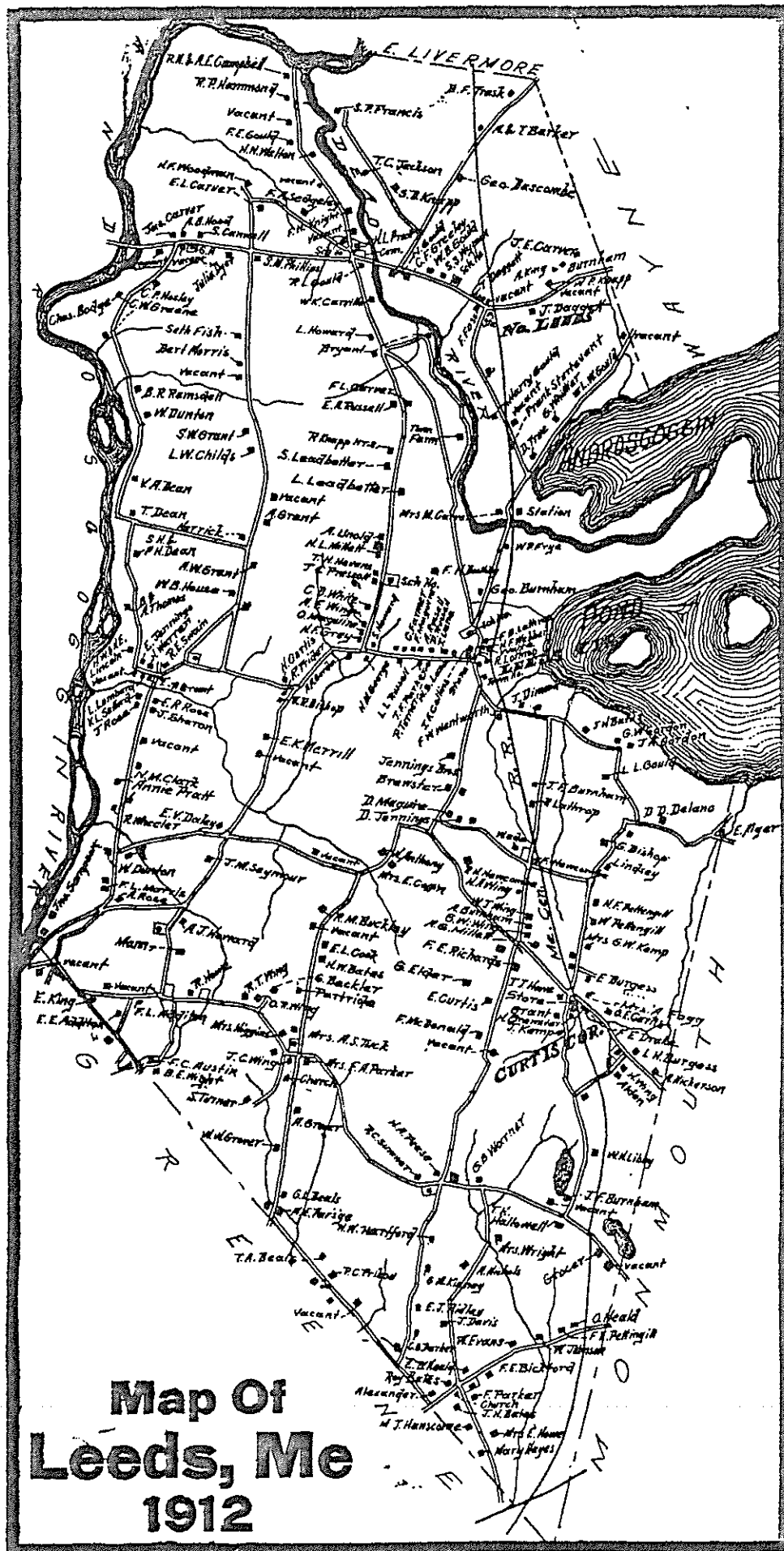
The point of this brief romp through Edens past is not to prove memory a liar. It is, rather, to suggest that Leeds has always been in a state of change, given to complexity and driven by dissatisfaction. In the past eighty years, the rate of change has been rapid indeed. Leeds has been transformed from a town of small family farms, isolated and intimate, into a diverse, diffuse residential community. When told by the generation whose lives have spanned these changes, the story is one of substantial gains: gains in educational opportunities, in work choices, in material comforts, and in access to the world beyond Leeds' borders. But the story is one of losses as well: the loss of an intimately known landscape and community, the loss of certain circumscribed ways of life and ways of looking at life. Leeds might return to old ways of *doing*—and some have done just that, by "going back to the land" and trying to recreate the self-sufficient family farm. But it cannot return to old ways of *seeing*, and so its residents speak finally of a loss of innocence, a loss of Eden. Memories of Eden, then, are more than simple nostalgia, or nostalgia for what was never really simple. They are expressions of ambivalence towards change itself.

"What does not change," wrote poet Charles Olson, "is the will to change." What does not change, as well, is our ambivalence toward the changes we have willed. These changes themselves give unique identity to a particular era: but the will to change, and ambivalence toward change, are constants in every era. One is the source and the other the curse of human history in the stories of Leeds and Eden alike. In Genesis, history began in earnest when Adam and Eve willfully changed their world by reaching for the apple. Then began the cycle of life and death, of things passing, Adam and Eve and their innocence included. "in Adam's fall, fell we all," the old rhyme reminds us. However it may lament the losses, Leeds continues to fall from Eden every day. For to fall from Eden is to fall into history. 

A CHRONOLOGY OF EVENTS IN LEEDS HISTORY

- 1779: First visits to the area by settlers from New Gloucester, Maine.
- 1780: First settlement.
- 1794: Baptist and Methodist religious revivals.
- 1795: Methodist class formed.
- 1800: Baptist Church organized.
- 1801: Leeds incorporated. First town meeting.
- 1806: Baptist meeting house built on Meeting House Hill.
- 1807: Quaker meeting house built on Quaker Ridge.
- 1822: Town gets first post-office (at Leeds Center).
- 1829: Freewill Baptist Church organized.
- 1830: Universalist Society organized..
- 1831: First town appropriation for poor relief.
- 1850: Town population peaks (1,652).
- 1852: Androscoggin Railroad Company runs first train to Leeds.
- 1864: Androscoggin Railroad Company switches gauges in defiance of Maine Supreme Court.
- 1875: Leeds Grange established, briefly.
- 1885: Leeds Grange reopens.
- 1887: Grange hall built.
- 1887-88: Cornshop at Leeds Center burns. New cornshop built.
- 1890: Leeds elects first woman to public office.
- 1893: State abolishes school districts, centralizing control of Leeds schools in local committee of three.
- 1899: Town population falling fast (999).
- 1901: Leeds Centennial Celebration held.
- 1906: D.F.D. Russell starts medical practice in Leeds.
- 1909: First town appropriation for fire-fighting.
- 1910: Leeds Telephone Association established.
- 1911: Town buys first snow roller.
- 1911-12: Doc Russell buys first car in town.
- 1912-ish: Cheese Factory shuts down.

- 1914: Ladies Circle of the Universalist Church established.
- 1915: Maine Sand and Gravel Company established in Leeds Plains.
- 1916: Swain's Mill shuts down.
- 1918: State mandates formation of Leeds-Greene-Turner school union.
- 1921: V.A. Deane High School opens.
- 1922: Walter Trider buys first radio in town.
- 1926: Route 106 sinks.
Construction of Gulf Island Dam in Lewiston-Auburn.
- 1930: Town population at all-time low (729).
- 1931: Town buys first snow plow.
- 1932: Route 106 sinks again.
- 1933: Central Maine Power brings first electric lines to Leeds. Town switch board moves to the bedroom of Flora "Central" Hewins, where it will remain for twenty-five years.
- 1936: Federal Works Projects Administration funds and jobs come to town.
- 1940: Bancroft-Martin culvert plant opens.
- 1946: Edgar Lane builds town's first broiler houses.
- 1947: Central Maine Power completes electrification of Leeds.
- 1949: Church of the Nazarene established at Keen's Corner. Town stops publishing vital statistics. Town purchases Stinchfield Point for public beach.
- 1952: Cornshop closes.
Leeds Community Church established. Town stops publishing names of poor relief recipients.
- 1953: Leeds Central Elementary School opens.
- 1954: Last passenger train to Leeds.
- 1955: Town meeting moves to Saturday and adopts secret ballot.
- 1960: Leeds Telephone Association sells holdings to Lewiston, Greene and Monmouth Telephone Company, which replaces crank phones with dial phones.
- 1964: Surplus Food Program started.
- 1966: Organization of Leavitt High School and School Administrative District 52.
- 1967: Self-Help Housing Program started.
- 1970: Rural Community Action Ministry established.
- 1981: Broiler industry collapses.



PART ONE
THE LAY OF THE LAND

The mind fits the world and shapes it, as a river fits and shapes
its own banks.

Annie Dillard

GEOGRAPHY

AT FIRST GLANCE, Leeds presents a pretty picture, but nothing too out of the ordinary: rolling hills and ridges covered with third or fourth-growth forest, dales divided between peat bog and pasture, the impressive Androscoggin River to the west, the island-eyed Androscoggin Lake to the east, a smaller river running unhurriedly from one Androscoggin to the other, and innumerable brooks threading the land between.

If one delves a little deeper, however, the pretty picture discloses several startling phenomena. Sand hills stand side by side with swamps. One of the rivers can flow in either direction but is commonly considered "Dead." Kettle holes and black sand islands punctuate land and lake. Even a rumoured "sunken river" may slink along beneath the untelling blacktop of Route 106.

Some of these phenomena have been the subject of scholarly speculation in the century past; all have been the subject of supper-table speculation at one time or another. The features which have been "explained" by science now seem natural enough, like the kettle hole, or the reversible current of the Dead River. Yet there is much in the lay of Leeds' land that remains shrouded in mystery—and those features which are still unexplained retain a slightly supernatural, even sinister aura: the sunken river, with its unfathomed depths, or the insidious swamp, with its reputation for swallowing horses alive.

But let us focus first on the features we can more easily explain: those dips and swells which lend so much charm to the landscape of Leeds. Like the rest of the state of Maine, the land surface of Leeds was given its arbitrary arrangement of rock and soil by a glacial shift estimated to have occurred over 20,000 years ago. In a series of advances and retreats determined by its own weight, a colossal ice sheet (colossal enough to cover Mounts Katahdin and Washington) dragged soil and fragments of rock back and forth, alternately scratching them up and smoothing them down, and ultimately leaving them strewn about the land in riotous combination. Following this period of glacial drift came a time of "modified drift," in which the melting glacial currents created waterways across the land. One product of the period of 'modified drift' is the ridge running like a spine down the center of Leeds. This ridge, which begins in Chesterville, Maine, and ends in South Leeds, is no ordi-

nary elevation. It is what is known in geological circles as an *esker* (and, in Maine lingo, as a "whaleback," "hogback," "windrow," "morriner," "Indian road," or "Indian railroad"): a long narrow rise of coarse gravel that was molded into shape by a river flowing through vallies or tunnels of ice within a decaying glacial sheet. The esker's delta—the final resting place of the gravel carried downstream by the ancient iced-in river—is in South Leeds, and is marked on the spot by Blue Rock Industries, a sand and gravel business which has, for several decades now, been mining the delta for its alluvial deposits.

The townspeople of Leeds, too, once took advantage of the ridge, by running a road along its top. "Ridge Road" began at the town dump and went north, past the town farm, to the ridge's intersection with Dead River. The gravel provided a fine natural roadbed, and the view afforded a fine reason for a ride. As Steven Deane recalls, "It was always a great thrill to ride along and look left or right, onto the tops of trees well below. A Sunday spin in a 1916 Chevy Baby Grand was a fine outing, if it included a ride along the top of Ridge Road." As another fellow less fondly recalls, however, the thrill was sometimes a little too great. "I remember coming down the Ridge Road with Herb Rider's horse," Doc Russell once said, "and when she was headed for home there was no way to slow her down. It was very icy, and I went from one side to the other all the way down the Ridge. I was glad to be off that road."

Although discontinued in the 1930s after its last residence (the town farm) closed down, the precipitous path of Ridge Road can still be taken, by foot if not Chevy or horse. One must simply use the new-sprung trees along the forest floor as indicators of its route and, when in doubt, stick to high ground. Anyone walking the ridge is encouraged to take at least one detour. Just west of the town farm foundations, beyond the brick and bramble, lies another unique geological formation: a circular depression apparently left in the land by the melting of an isolated block of glacial ice, and commonly called a *kettle-hole*.

The other major ridge of Leeds has no kettleholes, but it can still boast of inhabitants and roads in 1981. Neither so narrow-topped nor sharp-sided as the esker, Quaker Ridge (also known to previous generations as Richmond, Bates, or Bailey Hill) is more than just a ridge with a view. Its fertile farm and orchard land attracted many of Leeds' first farmers. Unfortunately, an inordinate number of those old homesteads have been burned to the ground by lightening—a fact which some residents cite as evidence of iron in the ridge's rock. According to a local surveyor, however, the presence of iron should make compasses go haywire; compasses taken up to Quaker Ridge stay perfectly calm. Most likely the composition of Quaker Ridge is just good old granite. An old granite quarry on the eastern slope of the ridge, behind the Poulin place, supports this supposition and testifies as well to the enterprising character of some nineteenth-century townspeople, who carved out parts of the ridge and shipped them to the expanding city of Lewiston.

But to return to matters of prominence. Aside from its two ridges, the land of Leeds contains countless small hills and three fairly large ones. To the northeast lies Hedgehog Hill, a prickly slope once known as North Mountain—until one clear day toward the end of the nineteenth century, when someone must have noticed that it looked more like a hill than a mountain, and much like a hedgehog besides. To the southeast lies Bishop Hill, which took its name from settler Zadock Bishop in 1783 and which has kept that name ever since, displaying unusual titular tenacity in a town where place names tend to come and go with the generations. This granite-bound promontory is further distinguished by one of the nicest views of Leeds around. As one Civil War strategy buff put it, "If you wanted to train cannons on Leeds, Bishop Hill is where you'd place them." The third large hill in town, Monument Hill, counters that idea with a more peaceable message. It is topped with a granite obelisk, erected by the Howard Brothers (Oliver Otis, Rowland Bailey, and Charles) in memory of the Civil War, and engraved with the words, "Peace was Sure."

Monument Hill is special in more ways than one. Although the highest ground in Leeds, its summit is only one hundred feet up from the trail entrance on North Road. Thus it offers climbers a spectacular full-circle view of the surrounding countryside for very little legwork. Monument Hill also takes the prize for the most names in the history of Leeds. In the last hundred years alone, town documents and other published writings have referred to it variously as Fish, Otis, and Boothby, as well as Monument Hill—depending on the hillside one was facing and the year one was facing it.

Indeed, if the many names given to the hills of Leeds are gathered together into a list, they far outnumber the hills themselves. Alden, Additon, Bailey, Bates, Bishop, Boothby, Chapel, Church, Fairview, Fish, Harvey, Hedgehog, Horsely, Lincoln, Meetinghouse, Monument, Old Johnny, Otis, Quaker, Richmond, Sand, Seamore, and Welcome. With a few exceptions, the names have kept changing to reflect their current residents. Sometimes the name has remained long after the family departed, as in the case of Bishop or Harvey Hill. Alden Hill, too, retained its name long after the original Aldens departed—only to prove a self-fulfilling prophesy in 1965, when Ruth and Martin Alden (of no relation to the olden-day Aldens) moved onto it. In another case, a Leeds hill name has readily shifted to accomodate changes not in the population but in the English language. Until well into the twentieth century, what is now Church Hill was known to some as Chapel Hill and to others as Meetinghouse Hill, depending on the person's preferred word for the places of worship atop it. Other town hills have been named for Nature and its enduring features rather than for humanity and its changeable ways. Fairview Hill on Fish Street speaks for itself, as does Sand Hill on River Road. Sand Hill was, in fact, once called Old Johnny Hill, after its first settler John Jennings. As happened frequently in the first century of Leeds' farming, however, Old Johnny tilled his hill until its topsoil—and its name—turned to Sand.

But whatever the name and whoever its namesake, the hills of Leeds have tended to be highly inhabitable and, as such, endearing. People live on them, love them, and, if they leave them, usually leave an appreciative name behind.

No such claim can be made for the swampland of Leeds. There are several different peat bogs in town. Yet, whether the murk in question lurks ten miles off or right in one's back field, it is perceived by townspeople as part of the same ubiquitous swamp and referred to unaffectionately as "The Bog." The largest continuous area of Bog extends down the middle of North Leeds between Fish Street and North Road, covering three hundred acres and ranging from ten to thirty feet in depth. A second swamp appears in patches between the Additon Hill Road and Route 106, and a third saturates the land between Curtis Corner and Quaker Ridge. With its ground cover of brush and scrub fir relieved by an occasional pond, the Bog qualifies neither as land nor lake, but as an admixture of both. It may be lake becoming land; it may be land that, centuries ago, soaked up the overflow from streams clogged by glacial debris. Either way, it does not accomodate farming or boating. It has, however, harbored a wide variety of wildlife over the years, from proven bears and moose in this century, to a probable bobcat or lynx in the last century, to a rumored panther in the earliest days of settlement. Nor has it been altogether immune to the human animal. In winter, lumberers have taken advantage of its frozen surface to cut off the wood; and, in the days before paved roads and snow plows, Leeds people used the Bog as a winter path rather than risk the uncertain surfaces and drifts of town roads. So too, before Leeds acquired electricity and, with it, the refrigerator, a few residents cut ice from the wintering Bog and sold it to neighbors, who filled up icehouse and icebox alike with blocks of frozen swamp.

But the most obvious substance to be harvested from the peat bogs of Leeds is peat itself. It is said that the first settlers used peat for fuel, and several of the shallow fireplaces in town seem specially built for its burning. If used in early years, however, peat quickly became an unpopular fuel. By 1886, at least one local writer was encouraging Leeds people to take notice of the peat in their backyard bog—implying that the townspeople had stop harvesting it altogether. George Varney, author of a "Gazetteer" of Maine published that year, noted in his discussion of Leeds that "the surface of the bog is seventy-five feet higher than the Dead River, and a ditch less seventy-five rods in length would drain it. The amount of fuel this might provide," he concluded, "is immense." Varney's advice went unheeded for a century. With the soaring of gas and oil prices in the 1970s, however, peat once again began to attract admirers. Although a poor automobile fuel, it has proven potential as both commercial and residential fuel—and it is with this potential in mind that regional industries and residents alike have been taking a closer look at those bogs in the backfields of Leeds.

Whatever the future may hold for them, the bogs of Leeds have already had an dramatic past—for they apparently contain quicksand as well as peat. Just south of where the Regional Medical Center now stands, a stream runs though the swampy

lowland, and on that stream a grist mill once stood. One day, so the story goes, a sudden blast of the mill's whistle scared a team of work horses, who bolted into the bog—and sank out of sight in just seconds. Even less believable, but much better substantiated, are stories about "the Sunken Road." According to those accounts, a section of Route 106 running northwest from the Brick Schoolhouse Road has a habit of sinking into the surrounding quagmire. The first of two known sinkings occurred around 1926 and was witnessed by a local road crew. As crew member Edward Burgess recalls, "We were attempting to build up the road with gravel, using dump carts and horses. If I remember right, Earl Nickerson, Elmer Riggs, Almont Wing and Henry Holt were shoveling by hand. The damned thing just started sinking, and a team of horses owned by Jim Pettengill went in. "

But the second sinking, in November 1932, was even more spectacular. In those days, Route 106 was just a "corduroy road," made of logs laid side by side. The logs had been slowly settling for two years, and then for about two weeks their downward tendencies became really noticeable. A road crew was out there one day, putting on gravel to build it back up, when all of a sudden the road began to disappear. As crew member Herbie Libby remembers it, he was standing with Road Commissioner Delbert 'Bud' Rose in the middle of the road, when the trees began to tilt in. "I says to him, 'Bud, I think we better be getting off this road.'" As soon as they did, recalls Herbie, "the side just rose up and turned in on the middle—just folded right in and went down." According to other witnesses, trees along the road-side tipped over tops first, so that the roots were floating on the swamp surface. "Boy," says Edward Burgess, thinking back on it, "that was some show. The corduroy logs just leapt in the air, and the mud flew."

The "show" lasted fifteen or twenty minutes—but it took a crew of fifteen men and a fleet of five gravel trucks nearly three weeks to repair the damage done. Estimations vary as to the length of the sunken section: the newspapers of the time said it measured 300 feet, but the men who filled it say it looked (and felt) three times as long. As for the depth of the hole—well, no one really knows. Two crew members, Bob Burgess and Royal Stevens, pieced together a pipe ninety feet long and drove it down at several points but never touched bottom. In order to fill this seemingly bottomless pit, the men felled trees from the banks, only to watch them sink from sight into the murk. They dumped in automobile bodies, uncounted cords of wood, and thousands of yards of gravel. "There used to be a hill on the corner of the Brick Schoolhouse Road and 106," says Herbie Libby. "That's in the hole now."

Nineteen days and almost three thousand dollars later, the sunken road was back in business. According to newspaper accounts, "prominent Leeds citizen" Howard Lincoln got the dubious privilege of being the first to drive across it, in his large and much-loved Buick. Lincoln need not have worried: driver, Buick, and road all stayed afloat—and the road has not sunk since. Still, in the next few decades, there were many springs when the section filled up with water, leaving drivers

in doubt as to whether the road bottom was still there beneath the black stretch of swamp. "One was never quite sure," says Marilyn Burgess, "whether she hadn't rolled over again and was just waiting for a few more cars to fill her up." After one too many springs like that, a group of residents banded together in 1970 to seek relief from the state road commissioner. As a result of their efforts, the road was repaved in 1970 and rebuilt the following year. Yet rumours continue to rise that the road continues to sink. Some believe that an ancient river still flows along beneath the ground, ready to swallow anything the townspeople offer it. And others swear they have seen the puddles along that particular section of road begin to shimmer and move, when the wind was quiet and all else quite still.



So who really knows about the waterways of Leeds? Once upon a time there may have been lakes lying where peat bogs now petrify, rivers rushing where gravel ridges now rise—and even today there may still be streams flowing where paved roads run. On the surface of things, however, there are only two rivers and one lake left in late twentieth-century Leeds: the Androscoggin River, the Dead River, and Androscoggin Lake.

The Androscoggin River and Androscoggin Lake, which form the western and eastern borders of Leeds respectively, have been the most influential natural features in the town's history, for better and for worse. While sharing the same name, they belong to two different water systems and receive their waters from two different drainage districts. According to Georgia Merrill's 1891 *History of Androscoggin County*, the drainage district of the river "occupies the country lying between the sea on the southeast and the northerly outposts of the White Mountain." The lake draws water from an area no smaller than 60,000 acres. Merrill's figures may be a bit on the expansive side, but the point they make is sound and significant: each of the Androscoggins drains off an immense amount of territory, and their waters are therefore thick with silt. Over centuries of flowing through Leeds, these waters have deposited a lot of their silt along their banks, creating wonderfully rich and stone-free soil for farming. It was that soil which first attracted settlers to the area and helped establish the town's agricultural character and reputation. During the last hundred years, however, a change has taken place in the town's character—and the change, too, is due in part to the ways of these waters, these two Androscoggins.

Leaving aside changes for a moment however, let us look first at the fixed features of these two influential waterways. The Androscoggin River, 136 miles in length, does most of its running around before coming through Leeds. Its source, Lake Umbagog, is part of the Rangle Lake system in northwestern Maine. From Umbagog, the river flows into New Hampshire, through the towns of Berlin and Gorham, and then passes east into Maine again, down through Rumford, Livermore Falls, Leeds, Lewiston and Brunswick, where its waters join those of the Kennebec river to head out to sea.

The waters of Androscoggin Lake are not quite so well-travelled. Starting up in the Sandy River area of Maine, they flow slowly downstream through a chain of seven lakes collectively called "the Thirty-Mile River:" from north to south, these are Parker Pond, Flying Pond, Echo Lake, Lovejoy Pond, Pickerel Pond, Pocasset Lake, and last of all, Androscoggin Lake. Although once called a "pond," Androscoggin deserves to be a lake: it covers six square miles, most of which do not lie in Leeds, and contains four islands, one of which does lie in Leeds. This island is something of a geological rarity. Its beaches contain fine fragments of the steel-gray mineral *manganese*: hence its name, Black Sand Island. Manganese can also be found in unfragmented form elsewhere in Androscoggin Lake—most notably, at the tip of the lake's peninsula, or "Cape." The Cape, in keeping with so much of Leeds' odd landscape, is another geological wonder. About one mile in length and a third of that in breadth, it marks the mouth of the Dead River on the lake's western shore. The Dead River ordinarily flows from the lake to the Androscoggin River; during spring melt, however, it sometimes reverses direction and flows back into the lake. The Cape consists of alluvial deposits left by the Dead on these occasional return trips, with the exception of the manganese promontories at its tip. These juttings were in fact once a cluster of islands in the lake—until the accumulated alluviation reached out and used them to make a peninsular point.

Running right down the Cape like a crooked spine, and from there wending its six-mile way across Leeds to join the Androscoggin River on the western side of town, is that peculiar reversible stream, Leeds' own Dead River. Both its name and its unhurried surface might give one the impression that the Dead is a lifeless little stream, when, in truth, few rivers have the Dead's lively ability to run in either direction, depending on the relative water levels at either end. This reversability is due to the fact that the river runs across flat land—but just how it came to do that, no one knows for sure. According to one theory, the gravel esker that runs through Leeds once served as a dam for the "Thirty-Mile River." At some point, probably during a glacial melt, the water pressure on the dam increased significantly; finally the Thirty-Mile River burst through the esker and rushed across the land to join the waters of the Androscoggin River, pushing gravel before it as it went and thereby digging its own riverbed. And indeed, the Dead River cuts through the esker (at the north end of the Lynn meadow) in such a decisive fashion as to support this theory.

Once acquainted with this river's rare running powers and dramatic past, the reader might reasonably ask, "Why, then, is it called Dead?" No one knows the answer to that—but we do know that, like most other things in Leeds, it has had more than one name. Before the Stinchfield family officially settled the area in 1779, others who roamed its woods and wilds (trappers, hunters, surveyors and such) knew the stream as Lucy's River—perhaps because Lucy lived on it, perhaps because she died in it, or perhaps because its changeable nature reminded some disappointed lover of a lady named Lucy. Whoever she was, we can only assume that Lucy shared the same fate as her river—which was officially pronounced "Dead" early on in the development of Leeds.

Of the two rivers running through Leeds, the Androscoggin actually deserves a deadly reputation far more than the Dead. Long before the era of white settlement, an Indian chief is said to have lost his daughter to the ravaging rapids of that river. In vengeance he placed a curse on the river, that from that day forth it would claim one life every year—a curse it has easily fulfilled, and then again some. “Of course, it’s a pretty long river,” points out Paul Geores, the story’s somewhat skeptical teller. “Starts way up in New Hampshire, so that’s a pretty safe prediction.”

The fact that Leeds shares the Androscoggin river with part of New Hampshire and much of Maine has proven to be a curse in its own right, however. The doings of other people in other places, upstream and down, have had a direct and largely destructive effect on the quality of life in Leeds twice in the past sixty years alone. First, in 1926, Central Maine Power Company constructed a hydro-electric power station downstream from Leeds, on the Lewiston-Auburn banks of the Androscoggin. When first activated, the Gulf Island Dam made a substantial contribution to local energy supplies (although by 1980 its contribution had dwindled to less than four percent of the power company’s total output). One of the dam’s side effects, however, was to force the river to slow down, back up, and widen its banks upstream—in short, to flood the alluvial farmland which had been a prime attraction for Leeds’ first settlers and farmers. Thus this once powerful river became a “man-made lake.” Prior to the dam’s construction, the river flowed with a swift forceful current over three sets of rapids in Leeds alone: first at the North Turner Twin Bridges; second, about two miles downstream, at the Deane and Griswold Islands; and third, at the Turner Center Bridge. Today, the river no longer rushes at any point but ambles along instead, passing slowly between its broadened banks of “flowage.”

Goings-on upstream have also wrought changes in the waters of the Androscoggin—this time affecting quality rather than quantity. Until well into the twentieth century, the river abounded in a variety of fish, among them trout, bass, atlantic salmon, pickerel and white perch. The name “Androscoggin” is a corruption of the Native American tribal name “Anasagunticook,” which means, according to one rather expansive translation, “the presence of migratory fish, with alewives in greatest abundance but also salmon, shad, and bass.” For Anasagunticooks and white settlers, the river was once a reliable source of fish regardless of the time of year: even in winter, one could chop a hole in the ice and catch a fine dinner. In the summer months of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, too, vacationers regularly arrived by rail from as far away as New York and Philadelphia, to fish along its banks or just bask in its breezes—and the river which flowed by them was so pure that farmers and fishermen alike drank freely from its waters. Undoubtedly some waste entered the river as it passed through one New England town after another, but the velocity of the current and the distance between towns prevented any major pollution problems—that is, until the paper mills began pouring a waste known as sulphite into its waters.

Sulphite pulping, the paper fabrication process which excretes this waste, was invented in 1867 and commercially launched in 1885. By 1905, sulphite mills adorned the banks of the Androscoggin at Berlin, Rumford and Chisholm. By 1941, these mills were producing about 5,800 tons of sulphite pulp per week, the waste liquor of which they discharged into the conveniently located river below. At first the Androscoggin's sulphite concentration was so dilute as to be unnoticable. By 1933, however the town of Leeds had become sufficiently aware of the problem to build a dam on the Dead River in an effort (ultimately unsuccessful) to keep the chemical wastes from entering Androscoggin Lake. Finally, in 1941, an especially hot and smelly summer forced the issue before people's eyes and noses—resulting in an official inquiry into the river's water quality and a recommendation for remedial action. The imposition of government anti-pollution recommendations and the subsequent phasing out of sulphite pulping by the paper industry eventually proved effective in cleansing the river. The fish for which it had been named and reknowned have begun their return. In the last forty years, the Androscoggin has gone from being one of the most polluted rivers in America to being one of the most touted success stories in the history of anti-pollution efforts. But history is never a closed book. The recent trend toward governmental de-regulation of industry has cast a shadow of uncertainty over this success story, and thrown its happy ending into doubt.

And yet, despite the many varied human efforts to control and manipulate the Androscoggin—despite the dams, the mills, the regulations—there comes a time every year when the river lets humanity know who is really in control. The time is almost always the month of March, and the medium of revelation is "spring melt." As the snows of winter turn to water, the Androscoggin rises to disclose its true force, brimming over its banks, battering bridges, effortlessly forcing the Dead River to turn around and make a mad dash for the lake. And if, as sometimes happens, warm and heavy rains collaborate with the melting snow, the river may present a truly awesome alluvial event: an ice freshet. After swelling with rain water and an accelerated thaw, the Androscoggin will suddenly lift up its winter blanket of ice, cracking it into chunks and heaving those chunks downstream and over banks. In March of 1859, West Leeds farmer Steven Rackley Deane had a close encounter with one such freshet and just barely lived to tell the tale to his diary that night:

I was driving on the River Road in Leeds in the late afternoon. It had been raining since yesterday morning and most of the snow had gone. The road at this point runs along perhaps twenty feet back from a fairly high and steep river bank [River Road has since been rerouted to run further back from the riverbank]. This river bank ranges in height above the surface of the river from ten to fifteen feet. I knew that the pressure of the rapidly rising river against the underside of the ice must be tremendous and I was worried.

Suddenly with a report like that of a cannon, a huge ice field rose on edge and fell forward on the ice below it with a thun-

derous crash. Behind this temporary dam of broken ice, I could see a foaming, roaring flood of river water. I whipped my horse across the intervale and up the steep side hill pasture, just in time to escape the great flood of water that poured up from the banks. . . .

The careful details of Deane's account seem born of shock—as if the farmer were deliberating repeating the moment to himself, not quite able to believe what he had seen and so narrowly escaped. The ice freshet on that day in 1859 made itself memorable, indeed, destroying one bridge after another as it moved downstream from Leeds.

The bridges of 1859 were wooden and somewhat easier to destroy than the steel structures of the present time. But, as poet Robert Frost has written, "For destruction ice/is great/ and will suffice"—even when steel is set up against it. In the Great Flood of 1936, unparalleled legions of water and ice rose together to decimate bridges up and down the Androscoggin. In Leeds, ice cakes carried off the four steel spans of the Turner Center bridge and dislocated several of its main piers. Further upstream, at the North Turner crossing, construction was underway for a steel bridge to replace the old wooden covered bridge, which had been left standing as a temporary overpass for traffic. A battering ram of ice soon made short shrift of that set-up, severely damaging the steelwork and completely destroying the wooden bridge. But the havoc wreaked by the Flood of '36 did not confine itself to bridges. Together, the town's three waterways rose up and flooded fields, roads, even homes. Androscoggin Lake swamped Leeds Center. The Dead River filled to the brim the cup of land beneath the bridge on Route 219 and then overflowed eastward for almost one mile, until it had arrived at the doorstep of Rose and Pratt's general store. And the Androscoggin River overtook West Leeds, entering its houses, enveloping its River Road, and sowing its fields with iceblocks so heavy they left permanent fissures in the earth. For twenty-four hours, the river discharged water and ice at a rate of 118,600 cubic feet per *second*, in contrast to its normal flow rate of 75,000 cubic feet per *minute*. According to a report prepared by the Army Corps of Engineers, a flood of such force can be expected to hit Leeds once every 150 years. At that rate, the Great Flood of 1936 should retain its title, undisputed, for at least another century—or so the townspeople hope.

And so, Indian chief or no Indian chief, the Androscoggin River has been at times a curse and at times a blessing to Leeds. Its far-reaching waters carried the first white settlers upstream, via canoe, to the area. But the same waters later brought sulphite wastes to town, downstream this time. Its silt-laden lappings gradually crafted the finest of farmland, rich and rock-free, along its intervale. But the same waters later backed up and, in one day's time, reclaimed their centuries of silt from the farmers of West Leeds. In 1936 its flood waters left ice cakes stacked six feet high in the middle of River Road. But just when townspeople had begun to talk of dynamiting that road block, the same waters rose again, graciously lifting the ice cakes up and moving them off the road. So the river giveth, and the river taketh away:

blessed be the name of the river. Less blessed perhaps, be the enterprisings of humanity along its banks—but blessed be the river itself. In its awesome ways of giving and taking, the Androscoggin always exacts a due of reverence.



Certain parts of Leeds have paid heavier dues than just reverence, in response to the river's give and take. For West Leeds, the flooding of the Androscoggin's banks by the Gulf Island Dam in 1926 proved costly and painful: the widening waters cost that community its finest farmland, and finally its agricultural way of life. North, South and central Leeds were less directly affected by the river's rising. Yet, in these parts of town, too, a change has been taking place in the lay of Leeds' land—a transformation of the landscape itself, from a graceful balance of farm, field and forest to a more populated, less cultivated, pattern of residence and woodland.

When the Stinchfields and other white settlers first came to Leeds in the 1780s and '90s, a thickly timbered landscape greeted their eyes—with the bald exceptions, of course, of Bishop Hill and Quaker Ridge. Through the strenuous efforts of those families and their descendants, much of the ranging forest was eventually converted into farmland, with each family farm averaging one hundred acres in size. About forty of those acres would be cleared and cultivated ("improved") and then painstakingly maintained, until the soil ran out of organic matter and turned to sand, whereupon the farmer went about improving another piece.

Unless later chosen for cultivation, the remaining sixty acres of the average farm served as a woodlot, its timber to be harvested time and again for an variety of uses. Leeds' homesteaders cut down the first-growth trees to build log cabins and the town's first frame houses, then made fences of the stumps and firewood of the leftovers: a few of the older houses in town contain the wonderfully wide planks of pumpkin wood and pine yielded by that "virgin forest." As the nineteenth century wore on and the forest grew back, the second growth trees served for firewood and buildings, and, increasingly, for commercial enterprises. Some of Leeds' timber went to Swain's Mill in West Leeds, or to White's Mill in North Leeds, to be transformed into boxboards, dowels, film spools and the like. Many of the second growth trees remained standing, however, for over one hundred years—until the onslaught of World War I, with its extraordinary demands for lumber. Portable sawmills popped up all over Leeds to take advantage of the new market; in just four years time, lumberers stripped away most of the centuried pine, spruce and hemlock in the area. Even the greenest of hackmatack found its way into Leeds sawmills to be hastily hacked and tacked into ammunition boxes and sent overseas.

Despite the lumber blitz of World War I, however, a few fine old second-growth trees still stand in Leeds today, for one reason or another having been spared the lumberer's saw. In the case of two pines, the reason was, simply, someone being neighborly. Earlier in this century, a clump of old pine trees stood on the border of the Sanders and Bryant places. Arthur Sanders owned the trees; neighbor Albert Scott Bryant loved to look at them. Then, sometime in the 1930s, Arthur hired a man to cut off the clump for pulpwood. When all but two of the trees had tumbled, Albert could not bear it any longer. He paid Arthur a visit and offered to buy those last two trees.

"Albert, you aren't gonna buy those trees," Arthur answered flatly.

Replied Albert, "I want to buy them so you can't cut them until after I'm gone."

"Albert," said Arthur, "I'll never cut those trees so long as you live."

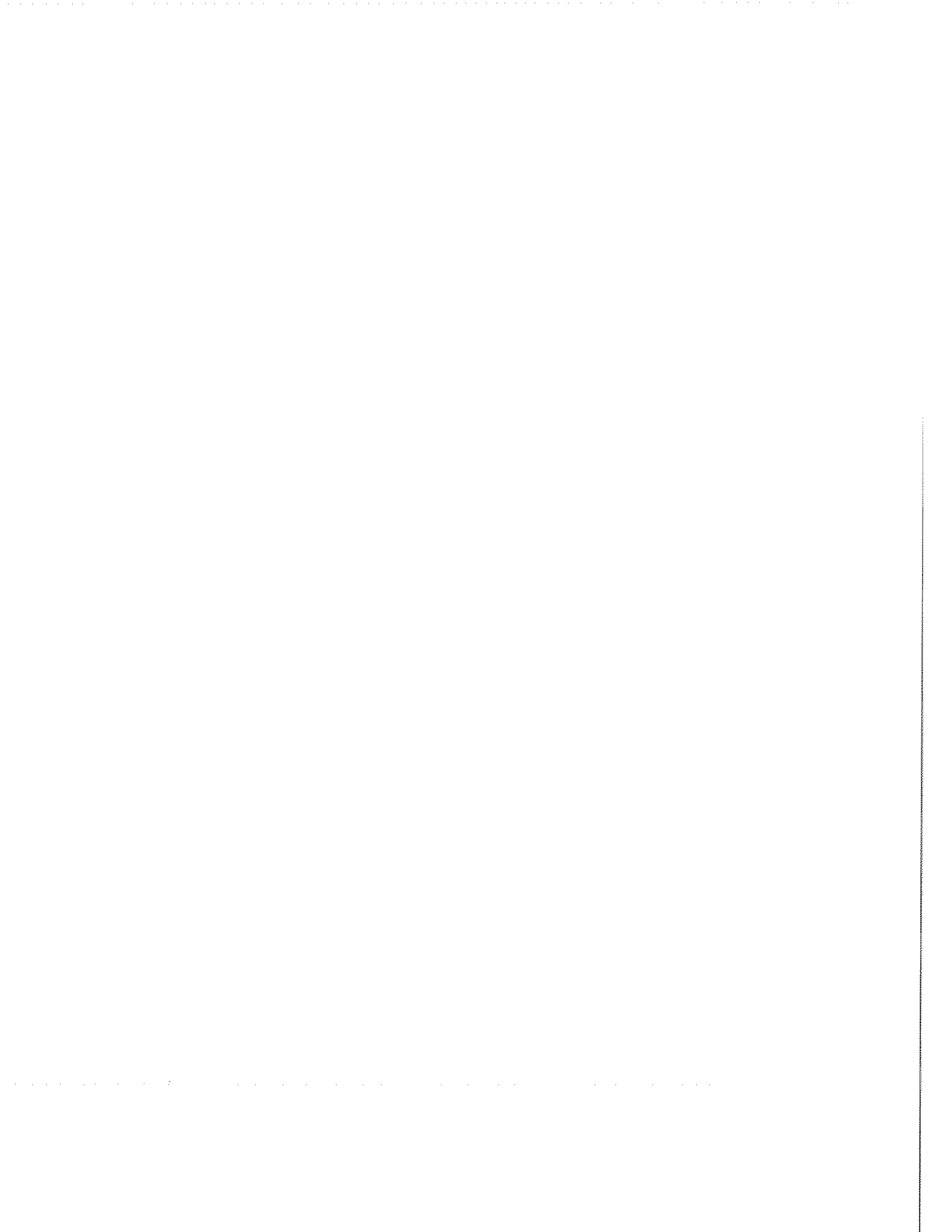
And he never did. The trees stand yet, their broad branches effortlessly shading a curve in the Dead River. But these two pines are by no means the oldest trees in Leeds. A maple standing just off Campbell Road probably deserves that title: it has already received national recognition as the oldest maple in America. Another much-acclaimed tree, an ancient specimen of the English Walnut (a tree native not to England but to the Middle East) presides over a patch of River Road in West Leeds, just across from the foundations of the Truman Deane place.

With these rare exceptions, however, the trees of Leeds today are but babes in the woods. In some cases, they take the place of trees toppled by hacksaw and axe during World War I. Others are poking up in lots recently stripped by power tools of the present time, those chainsaws and splitters heard buzzing ever more busily as townspeople turn back to the cheap warmth of wood heat. And many more new trees cover fields once cleared and cultivated by generation after generation of Leeds farmers. Forest returns in very little time: five years without a plough to the soil and the field will become a thicket; forty years, and it will have "returned to the Indians." The woods of Leeds are well threaded with stone walls, each wall an indication that the land around it once was cleared of trees and picked clean of rocks for cultivation. Some of Leeds' former fields grew back to woods a long time ago, abandoned by the very persons who had cleared them, after the soil "ran out." But when Leeds people of old abandoned one piece of land, they usually cleared off and improved another. At the present time, if woodland is cleared at all, it is done for the price of the timber taken, or to make way for a new house. Seldom, if ever, is Leeds' land now cleared for cows or crops.

To the unacquainted eye, the landscape of Leeds' may appear almost untouched by the twentieth century. The "fertile farms, bogs thickly studded with timber, and sand hills" for which a local writer praised Leeds in 1901 are still very much in evidence—are still, in fact, the defining features of the town's fair face. But

to the eye that has known that face long and well, the expression has changed in striking and even painful ways. For those living in North Leeds, where farms once stretched in an endless field, the biggest change is the return of the forest: woods are reclaiming the land. For those living in South Leeds, the bigger change is the way new houses are taking up the woods, making lawns but not fields of the land around them.

Just as North and South Leeds are two sides of the same town, so the changes they reflect are two sides of the same trend: a trend toward "living in the country," but away from "living off the land." People may be moving to Leeds in ever-increasing numbers, but fewer and fewer, whether native or newcomer, work their land for a living. So the patchwork pattern of farm and field that has covered this landscape since its settlement is fading, and what is emerging is as much a new pattern of life, as of land, for the town of Leeds. 🌳🌳🌳



TRANSPORTATION

TRANSPORTATION: the very word is uninspiring. It sits heavily on the tongue, instead of moving rapidly along as it rightfully ought—and, when finally forced into utterance, brings to mind dull encyclopedia entries and fifth-grade reports on foreign countries. The history of transportation has seldom inspired even its own chroniclers, much less the reading public. These historians of human motion tend to simplify at the expense of interest: they sweep years into eras, and assign to each era one vehicle, as if to imply that never the stagecoach and train did meet. Thus wrote Leeds historian J.C. Stinchfield in 1901: "With the disappearance of the stagecoach came the railroad, which extends the entire length of the town." At best, this kind of analysis confirms the reader's deepest suspicions about the dull nature of the history of transportation; at worst, it lends credence to the complaint by the King of Transportation, Henry Ford, that "history is bunk."

Unfortunately, the only study devoted to the history of transportation in Maine serves as a perfect example. Written in 1940 by J. Walter Leavitt and laboriously labelled *Some Interesting Phases in the Development of Transportation in Maine*, this slim pamphlet proposes that modes of transportation appeared in Maine in the following single-file parade:

- 1607–1775: Travel by Foot and Horseback
- 1775–1825: Travel by Wagon Wheels
- 1825–1900: Travel by Horse and Buggy
- 1825–1832: Travel by Canal
- 1832– : Travel by Railroad
- 1900– : Travel by Auto

Leavitt admits that "some overlapping . . . would be bound to result." Yet, even with allowances for overlapping, the parade bears little resemblance to the history of human movement in Leeds. The foot, for instance, remained a popular form of travel well into the twentieth century. The horse and buggy, too, lasted much longer than Leavitt permits: as late as the 1940s, horse-drawn vehicles were used for Leeds' less navigable roads and seasons.

In fact, a person travelling to or from Leeds in, say, the year 1920 had a remarkable number of vehicles from which to choose. Four daily passenger trains ran through town, two north and two south. Three daily freight trains awaited the

more tramping-minded. A steamboat puffed its way back and forth across Androscoggin Lake in the summer months. A steamship on the nearby Kennebec River stood ready to take you to Boston for two dollars and thirty-five cents. Leeds residents had forty-eight registered automobiles in towns and 298 registered horses; for the horses, they had a variety of attachables from carts to carriages, sleighs to pungs. Children set themselves in motion on bicycles, double-runner sleds, or barrel-stave skis. And, last but not least, the town contained a fleet of well-worn feet, for the shorter walks in life.

The traveller's choice was somewhat limited by age, wage, destination and season. In January steamboats sat in docks, while cars sat on blocks in garages. In March, not even the noblest steed could be counted on to get one beyond the barnyard. But in fair July a traveller of moderate means could choose from a vast array of vehicles, and make multiple combinations thereof. Charles Wood recalls using five different modes of transportation to get from Westport, Massachusetts to Leeds in 1911. "I had to pedal my bicycle into Westport and then board it at a livery stable for twenty-five cents a week," he says. "I then took a boat to Portland, the trolley to Lewiston, and the train from there to Leeds. When I got off at Leeds, I was met with a horse and wagon for the trip to the farm I was visiting!"

An accurate model for transportation developments in Leeds, then, would hardly be a single-file parade of vehicles over the years. Instead, the model might better be a three-ring circus. In the first ring (1787–1852) we find travellers on horseback, foot and wagon wheels—plus the occasional canoe. In the second ring (1852–1950) we have pedestrians, bicyclists, and horse-drawn vehicles of every kind, not to mention the "iron" horse; and, coming in a little late but with a great bang, the automobile. Traffic in that middle ring is a bit congested, as the various occupants fight tooth and nail for right-of-way on the roads of Leeds. But, turning to the third ring (1950–the present), we find the victor of that vicious battle, king of the road and lone ranger of Leeds today, the private automobile—trailed, of course, by that popular winter wonder, the snowmobile.

Some might object to this model on the grounds that a circus lacks the dignity and sobriety of Leavitt's single-file parade. In matters of transportation, however, Leeds people have seldom been dignified—and sometimes less than sober. As the following tales of folly and tomfoolery should indicate, a circus is the perfect model; it sets just the right tone and scene for the story of twentieth-century transportation in the town of Leeds, Maine.



While the more general history of transportation may have failed to capture the fancy of the American public, the particular story of railroading has done just the opposite: it has captured that fancy and held it fast. In 1981, Maine's last passenger train was phased out; yet romantic fascination with railroading only deepens as the railroads themselves disappear. Histories of Maine's many independent

lines now crowd the library shelves, each an epitaph for a railroad company, a way of travel, and a way of life gone by.

Leeds' own Androscoggin Railroad Company, founded by "a few enterprising men of Leeds" in 1848, has not been among the railways celebrated in recent years. While given an understandably laudatory chapter in J.C. Stinchfield's 1901 history of Leeds, the ARRC seldom receives more than a mention in railroad histories—and a dishonorable mention at that. One writer refers to the railway as "a vague little concern chartered in 1848, whose tracks left the Androscoggin & Kennebec [Railroad] at Leeds Junction and crawled northward with much tribulation to Farmington, reaching that place in 1859." Another notes that the Androscoggin "swallowed the entire fortunes of some of its promoters."

Both writers tell the truth: the railway had its trials and tribulations. But it also had its moments of glory. Few people in Leeds, and fewer without, realize that one of the great events in American railroad history took place on the very tracks that run through town. The year was 1861, and the event was the turning battle in Maine's bitter "War of the Gauges."

In the first decades of Maine trains, railroaders had not yet established standards for equipment and service, and the vacuum left plenty of room for experiment and argument. There was, in particular, some disagreement about the proper "gauge," or distance to be placed between rails. Boston railway builders chose to use the "narrow gauge" of 4 feet, 8.5 inches, when laying their tracks. Canadian builders preferred the 5 feet, 6 inches "broad gauge"—and Maine's budding railways soon found themselves caught in the middle. The state's southern lines adopted the narrow gauge, to facilitate connections with Boston and points south; the northern lines went with the broad gauge, to accommodate Canadian commerce. When the broad and narrow lines eventually met in the interior of Maine, they could not cooperate. Instead they competed, running their tracks along parallel lines and attempting to usurp each other's business, in a bloodless but impoverishing "War of the Gauges" that raged for thirty-seven years.

Meanwhile, back in Leeds, the founders of the ARRC had adopted a broad gauge, to connect with the broad-gauge tracks of the Androscoggin & Kennebec at Leeds Junction. In 1861, however, the ARRC began to lay tracks from Leeds Junction to Brunswick. This extension would enable the little railway to meet up with the narrow-gauge Kennebec & Portland, and thereby connect with Boston and points south. In a secret session, the directors of the ARRC decided to take advantage of the southern connection by switching their broad gauge to narrow as soon as the Brunswick spur had been completed. Officials of the Androscoggin & Kennebec got wind of the plot and, in order not to lose their link to the Leeds-Farmington line, took the case to the Maine Supreme Court, where they obtained an injunction against the plotted action. But the ARRC was not so easily foiled: it chose to fight and switch. When, on a Saturday in September, lawmen arrived in Leeds to serve the injunction, the railway directors went into hiding. The next day being

Sunday, the law rested—but the ARRC rested not. A force of men got out on the line and began switching the tracks from Leeds Junction to Farmington. For this bit of bravado, several directors of the ARRC received contempt-of-court citations. But the tracks stayed switched—and finally, in 1864, the Maine Supreme Court upheld the railway's right to change its own gauge.

Ironically, the consolidation of Maine's many independent railways began that same year; in 1864 the Androscoggin & Kennebec merged with another broad-gauge line to become the Maine Central Railroad. Six years later, The Kennebec & Portland leased its line to Maine Central, and the emerging corporation decided to go narrow-gauge on all its tracks. One by one, the independent companies leased their lines to Maine Central; one by one, they switched to the narrow gauge, which soon acquired the name and status of "the American Standard." By 1877, the domino reaction was complete. Leeds' own Androscoggin Railroad had been the first domino in that chain, the first railway in Maine (and America) to switch its gauge—and the only one to do so in defiance of the law.

On June 27, 1871, the ARRC leased its own line to Maine Central for 999 years, in exchange for thirty-three thousand dollars, plus two thousand shares of capital stock. Therewith ended the antics of Leeds' independent railroad company. What the line surrendered in independence of spirit, however, it apparently received back in dependability of service. As Stinchfield wrote of the Maine Central takeover, "since [that] time, with the building of snow fences and other modern equipments, the road has taken a place among those of high standard and good service." In the first few decades of the twentieth century, Maine Central maintained three stations in the town of Leeds alone: one at North Leeds, on the land now graced by the granaries of Decoster Egg Farms; one at Leeds Center, just east of the intersection of Church Hill Road and Route 106; and one at Curtis Corner, snuggled between the general store and the railroad tracks. Both North Leeds and Leeds Center had full-time station agents, who sold tickets, stoked fires in the waiting room, and handled the mail for the passenger trains. "The Curtis Corner station was what they called a flag station," explains Clarabel Burnham, long-time resident of Curtis Corner. "A man would put the flag out if the train was wanted to stop to pick up anybody. I guess a half-dozen, or perhaps a dozen, could sit in it if they had to. I guess they didn't have that many very often."

Not only did Leeds have three railroad stations once upon a time; it also had four daily passenger trains passing through, every day except Sunday. One train came down from Farmington in the morning, continued on to Portland and then returned to Leeds around midnight. Another came up from Boston just before noon, went on to Farmington, and then passed back through Leeds in mid-afternoon. Four daily passenger trains making scheduled stops in a town with a population averaging less than one thousand people might seem extravagant. Until cars provided a faster and more flexible alternative, however, trains provided the only practical transportation between Leeds and surrounding cities. Edson Waite grew up amid the hustle and bustle at the Leeds Center Station; his parents ran the gen-

eral store by the tracks, and Edson remembers a regular flow of passenger traffic until about 1930. "Everybody who had to go to Lewiston or Portland had to take the train," he explains. "Unless they took a horse and buggy, and that was a couple of days' trip. So they'd come to Leeds Center or one of the other stations, and they'd leave their horses at the blacksmith's shop, or at the store. My father had what was called a horse shed—a pretty big cover. They'd drive in, leave the team. Then they'd take their train, do their business, and come back at night."

What with all the comings and goings, the Leeds Center Station and Waite family store were regular social centers—so social, in fact, that the trains themselves were sometimes overlooked. "There was a man who had quite a lot of means," recalls Edson, "who used the passenger trains quite often. Name of Ralph Lothrop. He came down one morning to get on the train to go to Lewiston, got in a conversation with somebody. The train came in and went out, and after all he decided he was supposed to have been on it. But that," concludes Edson, "is what you get for talking too much."

Most Leeds people lacked Lothrop's means: they saved up their city business for an occasional train trip—and when they took that trip, they were sure to get on board. Leeds women might go in as much as twice a year, for food staples and sewing materials. For the lucky children who got to go along, the ride was a treat in itself, as special as that 'foreign land' of Lewiston or Livermore Falls. Then there were the summer people from Philadelphia, New York and Boston, who travelled by train to Leeds in order to reach their cottages on Androscoggin Lake or the hotels of neighboring Wayne. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, and possibly even later, Maine Central maintained yet a fourth station in Leeds for that summer traffic. Known as Frye's Crossing, this station sat across the tracks from what is now Riverbend Campground. Train passengers would be met there by a horse and wagon, to be taken to the lake shore and ferried across Androscoggin Lake in a small steamboat.

While busy with passenger traffic, Leeds' railroad stations occupied themselves in many other ways as well. They were, in fact, the scene of every imaginable transaction between the farming community and the world beyond its borders. Three daily freight trains brought in dry goods for the town's merchants and raw materials for its industries. The cargoes carried in varied from cans for the corn shop to coal for its boilers, from shoes for the general stores to shingles for the shed of farmers, from grain for Leeds' livestock to chicks for its hen houses. And the freight trains carried out the town's finished products, among them lumber and boxboards from the sawmills, canned corn from the corn shop, ice blocks from the Lothrop ice industry, and cattle and pigs from the region's farms. Every Monday forenoon, cattle buyers from Turner, Wayne and Leeds drove their herds to North Leeds or Leeds Center, picking up cattle along the way—"and they didn't always pay for them, either!" complains one livestock farmer who lived along the cattle route. Once safely at the station, the cattle were corralled until the southbound freight train came through, already laden with livestock purchased north of town.

Another cattle buyer would climb off the train, look the prospects over, and—if the local cattle driver was lucky—buy them up, then load them by ramp onto the departing train.

The passenger trains also handled a limited but very selective assortment of goods. Individual dairy farmers and milk collectors (known in those days as “truckers”) rode down to the nearest station in the mornings and loaded as many as fifty or sixty large and heavy cans of milk onto the southbound passenger train. Not only milk but mail came and went by rail. American Railway Express, the parcel post service of yesteryear, had an office at the Leeds Center Station, and later at the North Leeds station; so did Western Union Telegraph, which served less as a sender of telegraphs than a controller of train traffic during its tenure in Leeds. But the most precious cargo ever to arrive on a Leeds passenger train, passengers aside, was probably Prohibition rum, brought in on the Boston run. “The old soaks would send to Boston,” explains Edson. “They had to send their money by post, and have the liquor come in on that train. That’s how it got the name of ‘the Rum Train.’” (It also got the name of “Old Hugler,” somewhere along the line—the derivation of which this writer has been unable to discover.)

Thus the passenger trains brought in a special kind of freight from time to time. So too, from time to time the freight trains brought in a special kind of passenger: tramps. As soon as tracks were laid across Leeds, strangers walking or riding the rails became a familiar part of town life, to be feared by the younger children, ridiculed by the older ones, and packed off as quickly as possible by the authorities. “Oh,” says Edson, “tramps in Leeds were a dime a dozen.” Actually, they were more like a dollar a head: people who lived near the tracks were given a dollar by the town for every tramp fed or boarded. The local poorhouse, or “town farm,” hosted the majority of these visitors, though. In 1895, the town farm boarded an all-time high of one hundred tramps overnight. As a boy in the ‘teens, Cad Morris heard about—but never actually saw—a special room for tramps at that farm, a room with bars on its windows and locks on its door. “After they fed them, they put them in that room and locked the door,” says Cad. “Then they’d let them out again the morning, for breakfast.” The Great Depression brought an unusual number of wanderers through town: by that time, the town farm had closed down, so Leeds built a temporary tramphouse on the Jennings Road and hired Bill Violet to run it. Payment for tramps peaked in 1933, when the town gave out \$128.00 in aid. In the years following the Depression, however, tramps and tramphouses began to disappear from the life of Leeds. In 1941 the town paid out only twenty cents in tramp aid—and, after 1950, tramps were never mentioned in town records again.

In its century, now ended, of bringing tramps and other unknown quantities to town, the railroad became more than a way in or out of Leeds. The trains were the very veins of town life, pumping in and out the vital stuff of people and materials. They carried in food and fuel, and carried out produce and manufactured goods. They carried in mail and rum, and carried out mail and orders for more

rum. They carried in summer people and tramps—and carried out the sons and daughters of Leeds, to jobs in the cities and farmland in the West.

But the sons and daughters did not often return—and so the railroad was a drain as much as a source, draining out the town's young blood just as fast as it pumped other things in. The correlation between railroad growth and population decline in Leeds is dramatic. In the census of 1850, the town's population reached a record high of 1,652. The same year, Androscoggin Railroad Company began building its road from Leeds Junction to Farmington. In the census of 1860, the population of Leeds showed its first sign of decline since settlement days—and the decline continued for the next three decades, until in 1880 the town's population had fallen to 999 people. The de-population of the town in this period had many causes, of course: among them the casualties of civil war, the attractions of city life, and the vast economic promise of the newly settled West. But the luring lights of other worlds would have been considerably dimmer, had not railroad tracks run through town. For each generation coming of age after 1850, those tracks were a daily reminder of—and a direct route to—the hinted abundances beyond Leeds' borders. As Oliver Otis Howard noted in his Centennial Celebration Speech of 1901, "The railway running Leeds' entire length has caused some restlessness, and carried off its boys and girls to other spheres of usefulness and privileges superior to their mothers and fathers." Howard's statement is, to some extent, autobiographical: he himself had been carried away from Maine by rail, in 1861, to serve in the Civil War, and had gone on from the battlefields to pursue "privileges" in "spheres" far from Leeds—most notably, as the first director of the Freedmen's Bureau during Reconstruction. Nationally disgraced and nearly impeached for that effort, he nonetheless remained the favorite hero of his hometown; and, so, with perhaps a touch of ambivalence, Howard returned by rail to Leeds now and then, to pay brief visits, bask in local laurels and make warm speeches about the life he had left so long ago.

In the three decades after Howard's Centennial Speech, Maine railroad revenues continued to climb and Leeds' more restless residents continued to leave. In 1930 the town's population stooped to a nadir of 729. After 1930, however, the two trends reversed: the town began a halting climb upward in human numbers, and the Maine Central Railroad began a rapid descent in revenues. One trend did not directly cause the other, but they did have a cause in common—the advent of the automobile and improvement of Maine's roads.

In 1924, the Maine Central Railroad made its first—and almost its only—public acknowledgement of the threat posed by automobiles. The Director's Report for that year noted that "the large reduction in passenger traffic is becoming serious." Thereafter, the annual reports refrained from commentary and just reported the fact of decline. In Leeds, that decline revealed itself in the closing of stations. During the 1930s, Maine Central shut down and then tore down Curtis Corner station. At Leeds Center, the station agent was "retired," and Edson Waite, who had taken over his father's general store, began darting daily between store and

station to stoke the fires, sell the tickets and set out the mail—until that station, too, closed. By the late 1940s, passenger trains were completely on “flag-service” in Leeds, stopping only if the passenger waiting on the untended platform flagged them down. But even flag-service was more than the car-driving public needed; and finally, on December 10, 1954, passenger service on the Leeds-Farmington line came to a quiet halt. In a final twist of fate, Edson and Hilda Waite converted the Leeds Center station into an automobile garage. Arthur Fish put the North Leeds station to the same use. And so, to this day, the two sheds shelter the machines that put them out of business, paying endless homage to their conqueror of chrome.



In the early decades of the twentieth century, cars competed with and beat out trains for the long-distance travels of Leeds people. But the horse-and-buggy days were not so quick to depart as the railroad days. Well into the 1930s, horse-drawn vehicles still sufficed for the shortest hauls, the in-town trip to church, school, or the local store.

In a horse and buggy, of course, these “short hauls” were not always very short. Ocena Additon estimates that her carriage took her places at a rate of about six miles an hour, which means five to ten times slower than a car moves along local roads in Leeds today. One might imagine that such slow going on rutted roads made for miserable journeys. But, then, misery loves company—so Leeds people always made sure they had lots of company for the long rides to social functions. Young people attending a wintertime hymn sing at the Universalist Church piled into a single sled and sang all the way there and back. Edgar Lane remembers a Sunday School picnic of 1915 for the ride better than for the food and games. “The whole town was involved in it,” he says. “One of the farmers furnished a team, and hay, to carry all the families.”

Even when the whole town was not in the wagon, a horse-powered ride through Leeds had its own pleasures. The slower pace gave people time to soak up the sights as well as the rain. It gave them the leisure to observe the changing face of the world in which they lived: the daily differences registering in the color and texture of a corn field; the progress of a neighbor’s garden; the condition of the laundry on a newcomer’s line. And the lack of piped-in stereophonic sound encouraged travellers to exercise their voices. Albert Scott Bryant, the mail carrier for North, West, and central Leeds from 1909 to 1933, sang hymns to keep himself company as he made his daily rounds. According to son Stanley, “the rougher the weather, the louder he sang.”

If horse and buggy travel had unique pleasures, it also had peculiar problems. Foremost among these was the traveller’s vulnerability, vulnerability to the whims of the weather, the ways of wildwood animals, and the pranks of neighborhood boys. Edson Waite tells of one such prank: “Roy Turner and Earl Lane took the Fish girl, Tessie, and another girl that was staying at Camp Sunnycrest out one

night. Ben Turner and Carroll Farmer put some stuff across the road, and when Roy and Earl jumped out to take the stuff away, Ben and Carroll jumped in the wagon and took the girls for themselves."

Neighborhood boys were not the only pranksters in horse and buggy days. The horses themselves played even better tricks, and on their own drivers. Unlike a car, a horse has a mind and memory of its own: like a human being, it acquires habits and can become quite set in them. Alice Waite, now seventy, still laughs at the surprise tour of Leeds one horse gave an unsuspecting salesman. The salesman had come on business to the Waite's Leeds Center store and borrowed the family's horse and sleigh to go to North Leeds. "Don't worry about the way," said Mr. Waite. "The horse will bring you back." But the horse knew other ways as well: that day, it found its way back to an old home, the farm of Alice's grandfather, Amos Grant, on Fish Street.

Another horse with hard-learned habits belonged to mail carrier Albert Bryant. Old Dan "was black and wonderful for courage," Albert told a local journalist in 1933. "He helped take me through the storms for seven years and into the eighth winter and we didn't miss a day." Actually, there was one day when Albert did not make it—but Dan went dutifully on without him. "A Northwest sleet storm was raging," the mail carrier later recalled, "and the sleet was cutting into my face so I had my head turned away from it. I passed a mailbox, but when I discovered it I got out and walked back. Old Dan never liked to stand still, and when I got turned around again, he was going up the road. I could almost catch up with him, but the snow was too deep, and he gained on me. Patrons said that he called at every box." After Old Dan had made all the rounds, he trotted back to the post office and stopped. Albert caught up with him there a few hours later. But the mail carrier was more charmed than annoyed by the stubborn ways of this horse. He even hired a local muralist, Charles Edgeworth Phillips, to paint a likeness of the swayback steed on his living room wall, along with portraits of Bryant's wife Flora Ella, the local millstream, a favorite family dog, and mist-wrapped Mount Katahdin.

In fact, Albert Bryant loved his horses so much that he stuck to horse-and-buggy travel until his dying day. He was the last person in Leeds to resist, on principle, the temptations of automobile travel. Then there were Leeds people who were as fast to switch as Albert was to stick. D.F.D. Russell (1879-1975), who served as physician for Leeds and surrounding towns for more than seventy years, probably travelled local roads as much as any other person in Leeds history. Unlike fellow traveller Albert Bryant, however, Doc Russell did not have a way with horses: all too often horses had a way with him—much to the amusement of the townspeople. "I remember when I had that white mare of Lester Bates," the ninety-four year-old doctor told Edson Waite in 1973. "I was going over to Claude True's at night before dark, and when I got to his dooryard she kicked and kicked the fender off and broke a whip, and I got out and got a rope and tied her down. I stood up in the back, behind the seat, because I was afraid she was going to kick me

again, and get me. I thought if I went down the Ridge Road nobody would see me—but just as I was coming off that road, I met John Burnham. He wanted to know why I wasn't in front. The next morning I took that mare home," said Doc, "and old Mr. Bates, Lester's father, was standing in the barn door. I told him there wasn't room enough for both of us in the wagon. He laughed, and it was the first time I had ever seen him laugh in my life."

Doc Russell was quick to see the humor of his own predicaments with horses. He was also quick to see the value of an automobile: in fact, he had the first car in town. The year was 1911 or '12, the day was the fourth of July, the car was a Ford, and the new owner was unbridled in his delight. He drove about Leeds, showing his Ford off to people and horses alike. "Some of the horses took to the woods when they saw me coming," he recalled. That first car scared some people, too. "I got Herb Rider in my car and took him for a ride," said Doc Russell. "Up toward Wayne and over those hills, and he was hanging on for dear life."

Doc Russell gave many Leeds people their first automobile experiences. Others caught that memorable first ride in the car of a passing peddler—the Overland of the meatman, perhaps, or the truck of the milk collector. Usually the journey amounted to two breathless bumps down the road and a long walk back. Russell Adams, a child of Curtis Corner in the early 1900s, had one of the eerier first rides. He climbed aboard the car that had just caused Leeds' first auto fatality. "A Doctor Williams had an accident coming up Bishop Hill," recalls Russ:

He had a heavy robe over his knees, and when he went to shift into low at the top of the hill, he mistakenly got reverse and the car went backwards down the hill. It pinned Mr. and Mrs. Williams under the car, and Mrs. Williams died. The car was a 1908 Buick, I think. It didn't have a top on it. . . . The people from the Buick garage came to get it—it was still driveable—and they asked if there was anyone who wanted to drive in the car, although they wouldn't be coming back I had to walk back on the hot sand in my bare feet all the way from 202.

Ocena Additon remembers her first ride more fondly. It took place on the road to Farmington, in the Stanley Steamer of her husband's cousin's piano teacher: "We got that Steamer up to fifteen miles, and believe me we were flying." Ocena's sensation of speed was undoubtedly heightened by the seating arrangement of Stanley Steamers, which put the driver in the back seat and passengers in the front, with their feet dangling over the chassis edge.

Following those first automobile flights and fatalities, Leeds people went on to purchase their own cars: second-hand, mostly, with inner tubes for tires, cranks for starters, and price tags well below the hundred mark. With the exception of Doc Russell's well-used machine, the first cars entered life in Leeds as toys rather than necessities. They were hard to get going: "There was this place in the front where you put the crank in," says Martin Alden, "and then when and if you got it going you took the crank out and put it in the car, got in yourself." Once started, they

were hard to keep going: "We got a Ford, with a crank, about 1914," Alice Waite remembers, "and when we took it up a hill, the whole family had to go like this"—she rocks back and forth in her chair—"to keep it from conking." Hard to start and hard to keep going—but worst of all, they were sometimes hard to stop. "First car I ever had, my father bought, was an Olds," says Bob Grant, "and we had been somewhere and we come home and we got to the shed door, and he hollered 'whoa.' But it didn't 'whoa', and we went right through the back end of that shed." Perhaps the problem with those first cars was less the way they drove than the way they were driven. Either way, it meant that, in the words of Ocena Addition, "People didn't do much going, then. We might take a trip far as, oh, Gardiner on a Sunday," explains Ocena. "But you wouldn't go far. You'd have to change a tire once while you were on the road, patch it and blow it up. The car was practical, in a way," she says tentatively—then shrugs. "Still, we didn't use it."

The first cars of the teens were replaced by more reliable vehicles in the twenties. But even then, Leeds people kept using their horses, wagons and sleighs in certain seasons and on certain roads. "Leeds wasn't a town that changed fast," says Myrtis Pillsbury. "It was kind of a slow-going town then, like it is now." The conditions of Leeds' roads were particularly slow to change—and therein lies the main reason that the town did not roar in the roaring twenties, but continued to clip-clop and rumble around instead. Leeds drivers of the present day tend to take their graded, tarred and ploughed highways and byways for granted. "After all, a road is a road is a road," says veteran cruiser Louise Sanders. Before World War II, however, a road was not always a road: more often it resembled a rut, or a river, or a ribbon of ice. Nor was a bridge always a bridge, in the massive metal meaning of the modern word. "Didn't take much to be called a bridge, then," says Roswell Higgins, formerly of Quaker Ridge. "Just a few stones, a few planks of wood." A rut for a road, and a few planks for a bridge: these were the conditions encountered by Leeds' first drivers. They may have made for some picturesque postcards, but they hardly made for safe motoring—as one unfortunate carload of out-of-towners discovered on July 22, 1913.

According to the Maine Supreme Court case that arose from the incident, John McCarthy was taking his two young grandnieces for a chauffeured spin through the Maine countryside in his automobile. They were moving along at a speed of about six miles per hour when the automobile reached the Foss bridge across the Dead River on Route 219. One of the forward wheels struck a raised plank, turning the car from its course and into the bridge railing. The railing, in the words of the Court, proved "rotten, defective and worthless," and the car and occupants plunged straight into the river. Mr. McCarthy was rescued, but the two children were drowned. (Oddly, the fate of the chauffeur went unrecorded.) Both McCarthy and the family of the two girls took Leeds to court for their losses; in each case, judgement—if not justice—was rendered in the town's favor on the basis of a technicality. The court ruled that "as the automobile was not registered in the owner's name he was prohibited from using it on the highway and the town owed him no duty to keep the way safe and convenient for him to travel upon." (McCarthy vs. Inh. of Town of Leeds, 115 Maine 134; 116 Maine 277).

The year was 1913, and the accident and suit were a warning bell of sorts for Leeds: the age of the automobile is coming, prepare the way, prepare the way. But McCarthy lost that case, and Leeds ignored the warning. 1914: the bell rang again, and nearer to the ear. Leeds inhabitant Bert Merrill sued the town for damages incurred on one of its highways. This time the injured party won its case, and this time the town heard and heeded the warning bell. 1915: citizens at town meeting appropriated six hundred dollars to repair the fatal Foss bridge. 1916: citizens at town meeting raised fifty dollars for guide-posts and danger signals and agreed to pay another hefty sum for over-draw on the Foss bridge repairs. That same year, the town began to bring in as well as expend revenues as a result of automobile travel: the town report listed automobiles—a grand total of thirteen of them—as “taxable property” for the first time. The age of the automobile had finally arrived, and Leeds was preparing the way.

Not all the roads and bridges of old survived the transition from horse-and-buggy to car days. The Twin Bridges, crossing the Androscoggin River between North Turner and North Leeds, presented special problems. The bridges were wooden-covered crossings, held together with wooden pegs; one bridge extended from the Turner side, and one from the Leeds side; they met at a slight angle in the middle of the river, on Boothby Island. Unlike the public thoroughfares of the present, these were privately owned and operated toll bridges. The owners ran a tollhouse on the Turner side, where they collected passage fees figured per wagon axle and per oxen. (One nineteenth-century Leeds farmer named Ramsdell thought that any toll was too much to pay for the privilege of crossing a river. He had family to visit in Turner, however, and so he devised a scheme for doing his familial duty toll-free, by paying his visit in winter when the frozen river let him cross on his own. It was said that the thrifty farmer could always remember the mildest winter in his life—the one when he didn’t visit his cousin.)

For those with more regular business in Turner than farmer Ramsdell, however, the toll bridges were unavoidable. The public increasingly found them a shaky proposition, at best, costly to cross and untrustworthy underfoot. From 1917 until 1919, a group of local citizens petitioned the County Commissioner to take control of the operation, only to have their request repeatedly denied—until, in the 1920s, the bridge owners themselves decided to do something about the unhappy situation. They shut the bridges down altogether. This proved even more burdensome to the travelling public, who were now forced to travel upstream or down in order to cross at all, and who immediately began petitioning again, this time to have the bridges reopened. These petitions proved more successful; toll-service resumed and continued until 1935 when, under pressure from Leeds resident Gus Campbell, the county finally took possession of the crossing and began building two metal bridges to replace the wooden ones. The Great Flood of 1936 swept away the initial steelwork, but the county simply started again, this time building the bridges six inches higher than originally planned. Working mostly with funds provided by the Federal Works Project Administration, the county completed construction in 1937, and opened the two sturdy and toll-free metal “Campbell”

bridges to a tired and grateful public.

The battle for better road and bridge conditions in the age of the automobile was an uphill one all the way. Part of the problem was the sheer number of roads created and kept by the townspeople. Many ghosts of former roads haunt Leeds' woods today: most of these paths were not discontinued until the 1930s, when the town began opting for fewer roads in better condition. Before that time, the town's roads received only minimal attention from the town road crew, and, given the tools at the crew's disposal, attention could be very minimal indeed. In the town report for 1931, we find a most enlightening list of "Tools in Hands of Road Commissioner, Delbert Rose:" it enumerates a snow fence, horse-drawn graders, snow rollers, steel road drags, stump pullers, culvert cleaners, picks, potato diggers, spades, drills, snow shovels, bush scythes and sneths, stone hammers, twenty pounds of dynamite, chain hoists, grub hoes, hand hoes, and an ox shovel. Not an encouraging list, on the whole. Within a few months, however, the town had added an important item to that list, an item that would do more for motoring conditions in Leeds than all the grub hoes and potato diggers in the world put together: a snow plow.

Until the winter of 1931, Leeds had been caring for its snowy roads with a fleet of snow-rollers and a back-up contingent of chains and poles. A snow-roller is a single wooden wheel, standing about ten feet high, which is weighted down by rocks or bags of sand and then dragged along the road by several teams of horses. Rocky Page, who as a child hitched rides with the North Leeds roller crew, remembers the operation in sets of threes: there were three teams of horses, three sets of reins, and three crew members to every roller. There were also three snow-rollers in use at any one time, and three sheds spread around town to shelter them: one at "Trider's Corner" in West Leeds, just west of the old schoolhouse; one behind the old Carver (now Guest) place in North Leeds; and one behind the Brick Schoolhouse on the Bernie Hartford Road.

The snow-rollers rolled their snow very slowly—so slowly, in fact, that certain parts of Leeds never saw a snow-roller at all. According to Roswell Higgins, the West Leeds roller only went as far south as Trider's Corner. "We broke snow by chain-and-pole from that corner back to the foot of Additon Hill," he says. "We had a pair of horses and a set of sleds, and we put a stick in front, chained to it, and just drove along the road." The chain-and-pole method had, in fact, been Leeds' only mechanical snow-clearing technique until 1911, when the town purchased its first snow-roller for ninety-five dollars.

Some Leeds inhabitants remember with pleasure the spectacle of sound produced by a snow-roller. "You should have heard it," says Cad Morris. "The bells on the harnesses of three pair of horses, and the men hollering at them, talking to their horses." But few people remember with pleasure the road conditions created by snow-rolling. The weighted wheel simply packed the snow down, making a firm surface for horses' hooves in mid-winter. By March, however, the packed

snow usually stood three feet high on the roads—and, as the weather warmed, that snow would very slowly melt, turning to several feet of slush with a deceptively crusty surface. Travellers in horse-drawn vehicles learned to leave the March roads alone and take to the fields instead: otherwise, the horses might sink to their bellies, forcing the drivers into the slush to shovel them out by hand. When the packed snow finally melted away, mud season would set in with a vengeance unmatched since snow-rolling days. A Leeds person could look forward to one solid month of mud, during which travel was out of the question—unless, of course, that person was Doc Russell, in which case staying put was out of the question. “Whether roads are practically impassable due to deep spring-time mud, clogged with Winter’s drifting snow in fierce blizzards, or blocked by floods such as that of late March,” wrote a local reporter in 1953, “Dr. Russell somehow gets through to the sick.” Much of the doctor’s weather-hardy behavior was exhibited in the line of medical duty—but not all of it. As Russell himself once recalled, “A fellow who lived down below where Elden Addition now lives had gotten two deer; you could get two back then. He told me I could have one of the heads if I wanted it. It was in the spring, and melting, but I took the team and tried to get there. I buried my horse a half-dozen times,” he says boastfully, “but I finally got it!” For a man who liked mobility as much as Doc Russell, the snow-rollers were a mixed blessing: they made winter passable and spring just the opposite. But there was nothing mixed about the blessing of the snow-plow, successor to the snow-roller: it was, as the doctor said, “quite a Godsend to me.”

Never a town to spend money brashly, even on Godsend, Leeds deliberated long and hard before purchasing that first plow. It even arranged for a “demonstration,” by hiring the town of Livermore Falls to ride its old Lynn tractor down Route 106 and up the North Road. The little demonstration went over big, and in the winter of 1931 the town began driving its own plow and tractor—a small Walters. The purchase did not transform Leeds’ roads overnight: there was just that one small plow for all the town’s many roads until 1945, when Leeds purchased a second, bigger Walters. And even after 1945, there remained the problem that many roads were too narrow to be plowed—a problem not yet solved, as anyone who has lost a mailbox can tell you.

In order to get the roads cleared in the one-plow days between ‘31 and ‘45, Leeds hired small trucks to do the blacktops of Routes 106 and 219. Russ Pettengill had that job for a while, then Arthur Mulherin, and then the Murphy brothers. Russ had only a ton-and-a-half truck and a small plow, but, as an admiring Martin Alden recalls, he made up for his machines in “nerve.” Rocky Page remembers riding with Russ during a blizzard so blinding they could barely see the windshield. But Russ just kept going . . . and going . . . and going Finally Rocky turned to the determined driver and asked if he could see anything. “Nah,” said Russ, “but I’m hoping to soon.”

When a truck broke down in those one-plow days, there wasn’t another one to come to the rescue. The crew just stayed on it until they got it running again, or

until one of the men had travelled as far as Portland and back for new parts. And, once it was running, the crew kept it running until the main roads were open—sometimes thirty hours at a stretch. Martin Alden plowed roads in the two-plow years, when the '31 Walters did the north end of town and the '45 Walters the south end, with Church Hill Road as the Mason-Dixon line. "Even in those days," says Martin, "a person might not see a plow for as much as two weeks."

Well into the 1950s, however, Leeds people worked at home as much as away—and if they did have to travel, they relied not on municipal services but on their own ingenuity to do so. In the days when the Additon family sold potatoes instead of milk, Ocena and Ernest went to Lewiston regularly to sell their produce: if it was winter, they simply took to the river instead of the road. "We'd take a big sled," says Ocena, "load it up with bags of potatoes, get on the river, get off it at Lewiston." Both Doc Russell and Florus "Bant" Additon, long-time mail carrier for South Leeds, made their own "snow-mobiles" for snow and ice by strapping skis to their Model-T's. And many recall the time Doc Russell put someone else at the wheel of his car and himself into its trunk, to get the needed traction up the wintry slopes of Quaker Ridge—a story that has become a favorite with Leeds people, as a symbol of that doctor's dedication to his job.



In his perseverance, dedication and self-effacing sense of humor, Doc Russell graced the lives of Leeds people for nearly a century, and he graces their memories still; hence his many appearances in this history of twentieth-century Leeds. But the frequency with which Doc Russell appears in this particular chapter tells us something else as well, something about life in Leeds and not just about Doc Russell. It reveals a close association in the town's collective memory between early ways of travel and early ways of doctoring. At a testimonial dinner for Doc Russell upon his official "retirement" in 1954 (he unofficially continued to practice for another 20 years), the Leeds School Auditorium was hung with images of the honored guest: there were, in all, one portrait and three pen-and-ink sketches. One might have expected the drawings to show the doctor aiding the ailing in some "old-school" way: by a bedside, perhaps, or in his office. Instead, each drawing shows him in motion: sitting in a buggy drawn by a white horse; leaving his Model-T "snowmobile" to wade through an impressive snowdrift toward an invisible door; riding along the countryside in a "modern" car. The images are of movement rather than medicine, of travelling rather than doctoring. The artist of these images—and, as we have seen, the town itself—equated Russell's medical service with his marvelous mobility.

This equation sheds light in two directions. Travelling was an important part of doctoring: the effort made to visit someone meant as much as the medicine prescribed. But doctoring was also the definition, par excellence, of travelling. Indeed, for many Leeds people Doc Russell is the living meaning of those first cars. In the early part of the twentieth century, travel was not a part of everyone's life. It

was the province and passion of the few: the mail carriers, doctors, peddlers and road workers whose memories, for the most part, fill this chapter. Other townspeople—the farmers, store owners, teachers, and general laborers—had their own travel tales to tell: a memorable mud season, or the first Model-T. But these are tales of adventure rather than samples of daily life. For most Leeds residents, daily life was made up of places and people within reach—and one's reach was measured by a pair of feet, a bicycle or, at best, a horse. Out of these people and places, Leeds residents constructed their worlds: worlds of family, worlds of work, the daily world of the neighborhood store, and, more sparingly sampled, the larger circle of the Leeds community.

For the last hundred years, the town of Leeds has experienced an ongoing revolution in modes of travel—and an on-going shattering of its constructed worlds. Each generation has paid witness, in its own way, to the shattering. In 1901, Oliver Otis Howard noted the weakening of Leeds families by the railroad which, he said, had caused some “restlessness” and removal among the young. In the mid-1950s, Lucy Sylvester Herrick explained to newcomer Melva Geores what had happened to “that solid type of society, where everyone knew who they were and what they were supposed to do.” The automobile, she said, “widened people's horizons, and when those horizons widened, well, people just weren't satisfied anymore.” In the mid-1970s, Leon Safford unhappily pointed out the effects of automobiles on small-farm businesses, arguing that farmers would be “just as well off with horses as we are with cars today.” Machine engines, said Safford, had put the small farmers out of business, while the uneven terrain of Leeds could hardly support big farmers. And, in 1981, Myrtis Pillsbury passed harsh judgement on the automobile's effect on neighborly ways. In the horse and buggy days, she said, “People knew their neighbors better, stayed in their own districts, and were satisfied.”

A deep sense of loss, albeit sometimes tempered with an acknowledgement of gain, is common to all these statements—a sense that, with each revolution in modes of transportation, Leeds lost something important in its way of life. Yet, if we look around, we find that life in Leeds contains new versions of the old worlds lamented: residents still move within the worlds of family, of work, of neighborhood, of community. Family life now extends as far as the grandparents' trailer on the Florida Coast; neighborhoods stretch across town; work worlds encompass the nearby cities of Lewiston and Augusta. The constructed worlds of Leeds people still stand; but the boundaries expand and the contents change, as they measure life newly, with new modes of travel. ☘☘☘

NEIGHBORHOODS

WHEN A GROUP OF CITIZENS from Leeds and surrounding towns began raising money for a medical center in the early 1970s, they devised, among other publicity ploys, a bumper sticker. "SUPPORT THE REGIONAL MEDICAL CENTER," it urged and added, in quieter letters, "Downtown Leeds." For persons unfamiliar with Leeds, the slogan must have seemed as earnest as any ever borne by a bumper. In the local area, though, it generated laughter as well as donations. The new medical center was destined for a quiet intersection in Leeds Center, with a handful of houses for neighbors and an expansive hay field for its "greater downtown area."

In truth, Leeds has no downtown, no uptown, not even a shop-lined main street—and it never has. Nine miles long and six miles wide, intricately webbed with rivers and ridges, its population sparse and its climate tyrannical, Leeds did not, for two centuries, forge a single center for community life. Instead, it developed many separate villages and hamlets—each a daily world unto itself, fashioned by its inhabitants out of the materials within reach: the homes and talents of their neighbors. The boundaries of these worlds were measured with a pedestrian stride, and their contents were treasured with a pedestrian's eye. Every neighbor and niche was known in the intimate detail with which a person, out strolling, can take in the slowly passing landscape of tree and boulder.

In the years since World War II, rapid improvements in transportation and telecommunications have tamed the unruly continent of Leeds for the daily traveller. So too, these improvements have broken down the walls between the town and the world beyond its borders. The neighborhood of life is broader, and yet shallower too: for we know it, not with the intimate eye of the walker, but with the selective and superficial glance of the motorist. Leeds has, in a sense, finally acquired a downtown area: the vast impersonal urban belt surrounding it. But what the town has gained in access to that larger world, it has lost at home: the enforced communion of lives on a common ground.



The first century of life in Leeds tells a story of order wrought in the wilderness—of boundaries built in an effort to divide a new, unruly world into more manageable packages for human handling. The stone fences which still lace the landscape are the most visible reminders of that quest for order: they transformed the wilderness into a workplace, dividing soil from stone, forest from pasture, and field from flock. But the settlers built a number of other less visible boundaries as well, boundaries which defined not the land but their lives, by naming, numbering, and limiting the world of experience.

For settler Thomas Stinchfield, the first step toward conquering the land was dividing it. After laying claim to the northern half of the township, he divided it into four long lots, giving the westernmost strip along Androscoggin River to son-in-law Isaac Freeman, the second strip to fellow traveller Thomas Francis, the third to step-son Marshfield Paul, and keeping the last lakeshore stretch for himself. The families who followed Stinchfield to Leeds took advantage of the natural dividers of hillside and roadside to define their own turf: the Bishops occupied one hill and the Additons another, the Goulds colonized one corner and the Curtises another. Each family created a cluster of settlement around one particular point and gave its name to that point: Additon Hill, Gould's Corner, Bishop Hill, Curtis Corner, and so on. The familial hold on that hillside or roadside eventually loosened, and the names sometimes changed—but the natural boundaries and the collective identity of one cluster remained, making territorial sense of the wild topography of Leeds.

Across these territorial lines, the settlers and their successors laid two more sets of boundaries. In 1801, Leeds' first selectmen sawed up the township into nine school districts, giving to each a number and, in time, a one-room schoolhouse named after a poet, president or place: Longfellow, Lincoln, Whittier, Washington, Garfield, McKinley, Otis, and Plains were among these names. With only minimal remapping to accommodate shifts in population, the school district lines laid down in 1801 endured for the next 150 years; during that time they defined and limited the daily world of Leeds children.

In a somewhat more gradual, less arbitrary fashion, the townspeople also drew lines which defined the daily world of Leeds adults—lines of habit rather than law, which divided the township into five neighborhoods: Leeds Center, North Leeds, Curtis Corner, West Leeds, and Quaker Ridge. Many other minor neighborhoods rose and fell on the tides of the nineteenth century; but, by 1901, only these five remained, buoyed up by special economic or geographical virtues. Leeds Center, North Leeds and Curtis Corner had been greatly helped by the railroad stations set in their midst, and by their location on well-travelled roads. Quaker Ridge had the undeniable distinction of its ridge, which naturally set it apart from the lower reaches of Leeds. West Leeds, nestled near the banks of the Androscoggin River, was distinguished first by the prosperity of its fine alluvial farms, next by its mill town "Slab City," and later by the poverty created by the loss of both.

Whatever their distinctive qualities, all five neighborhoods had the same essential institutions at their center: a post office and, with the odd exception of Quaker Ridge, a general store. While the general store was an important meeting ground for neighbors, the post office defined the neighborhood itself, and for good reason; until Rural Free Delivery came to town in 1911, residents had to go fetch their mail themselves. The nearest post office thus became the natural nucleus for a broader circle of life—and, as if to confirm the collective identity of those living within its circle, each post office had a distinct mailing address. Leeds inhabitants did not give their address as “Leeds, Maine,” but rather as “Curtis Corner, Maine,” or “North Leeds, Maine.”

And indeed, separate addresses made perfect sense—for Leeds neighborhoods were separate communities, in deed as in name. Until paved roads, snow plows and sound telephone lines finally conquered the unruly continent in the mid-twentieth century, residents seldom crossed the lines of family territory, school district and neighborhood laid down by their predecessors. Every season of life, from childhood to old age, had its own set of boundaries—and within them a world, rich and complex, to be explored.



For the child born to turn-of-the-century Leeds, the first known world was the family territory, with its natural contours of hillside and riverbank. In 1901, O. O. Howard regaled his Centennial Celebration audience with a bit of nostalgia about that childhood scene. “A boy’s environment,” he mused: “I looked out the window of our two-story farmhouse, to behold the Wayne Pond and the great hill of Leeds—at least the north side of it.” That farmhouse on North Road was the starting point of young Howard’s world, and the pond and Monument hill were its furthest reaches: but within those bounds the boy found a world full of playgrounds. On the eastern edge of his father’s fields stood the farm of uncle Barnabus Howard, and “Oh,” recalled Howard, “what a beautiful place that was, to the boys of my age. The small ponds by the ridge, where we constructed ingenious rafts; the apple orchard to climb in; the maple trees in spring time for sugar and for famous camping; the long barn with all its attractions. . . and outside the large barn doors just right for ‘barn ball.’” Playmates, like playgrounds, had to be discovered between the pond and the hill, but Howard had no dearth of companions. His childhood belonged to the days before civil war and westward exodus, when, in the words of Leeds poet Elsie Bryant:

Our grandpas says that one could call,
Without once leaving his farm wall,
For coasting parties or games indoor,
A band together, perhaps a score.

The Leeds roads of those days were thick with houses, and almost every house thronged with children. Uncle Barnabus alone had a houseful of nine young

Howards, their names making a rhyme of rapid reproduction: Melvin Clark, Marilla Mark, Luther Loomis, Lucy Mitchell, Hannah Lane, Mary Jane, Dexter Waterman, Clara Cornelia, Almira Augusta. (The life stories of these nine suggest one common reason for the length of the rhyme: only four of them lived to the age of thirty.) By 1901, playmates were not quite so prolific as in Howard's day. But the dimensions of the playground had changed little. A child's world was still contained in the view from one's farmhouse window and still measured by the length and strength of one's legs.

With the advent of school at age five, the boundaries of life broadened slightly, as the child's daily center shifted from the family farm to the local schoolhouse. Those boundaries were still to some extent measured with pedestrian stride, for Leeds' first selectmen had drawn school district lines with the practical intention of enabling every child to walk to school. The length of that walk varied from child to child: while a lucky few simply skipped across the road to the schoolhouse, those tucked into the far corners of their district trudged as many as two miles round-trip—and more, if they took the tempting route of “one mile over and two miles back.” Others did not walk at all, for, as population patterns changed and the schoolhouses aged, “conveying scholars” became a necessary evil. In the 1901 report of School Superintendent Frank Herrick, for instance, we learn that the Additon Hill school had been closed for lack of “scholars” (as students were then called), and its district children conveyed by wagon to the neighboring town of Greene; for the same reason, the Leeds Center and North Road schools had merged, with terms alternating between the two schoolhouses; the North Turner bridge school had sent its scholars up the road to Gould's Corner; and the Plains schoolhouse had been labelled a health hazard, and its scholars scattered across town. As veterans of conveyance recall, however, new school districts did not necessarily open up new worlds for exploration: following the wagon ride, a child simply traded the four walls of one schoolhouse for those of another. Edith Howe, a scholar shipped to Greene, had to take the only ride going that way: a wagon destined for the early shift at a Lewiston shoe shop. Arriving hours before the start of class, Edith and her fellow travellers were immediately shut up in the schoolhouse—and there they stayed, until the wagon came again to convey them directly home. Conveyance enabled children to see a bit more of the world around them—but one world only remained theirs for the roaming: the world encompassed by their home district. Leeds children shared little common ground with those on the other side of their district lines until the great day of eighth-grade graduation rolled around. Then the entire eighth grade of the Leeds community gathered together, for the first and last time, at the Grange Hall in Leeds Center.

Graduation day was one of pomp and changing circumstance. With recitations, orations, and processions, children gave up the narrow world of the local schoolhouse and greeted the much broader ground of high school. Turn-of-the-century Leeds had no established high school of its own. On occasion, the town attempted to provide a “free high school” education, dispensed for a term or two (without enduring success) in the home of a generous resident. Most years, however,

families had to send their children to the institutions of neighboring towns, the most common choices being Monmouth Academy, Kent's Hill Seminary, or Turner's Leavitt Institute. While the town paid the tuition bill, it did not provide the equally indispensable service of transportation. Scholars either had to have a wagon at their daily disposal, the money to pay their room and board, or an hospitable relative in an appropriate town. Those who possessed one or the other of these advantages had the option of a high school education; others went without—until 1921, when West Leeds farmer Volney Deane bequeathed his estate to the town, for the express purpose of establishing a public high school. (According to local legend, Deane's motives were not entirely civic, or civil: he and his brother Truman, both wealthy bachelor farmers, were mutually dedicated to preventing each other from inheriting their own property. When death approached Volney first, he prevented Truman from benefiting by establishing a trust fund for a high school in his name and neighborhood.)

Leeds did not quibble about benefactory motives: it used Deane's money to build a partition down the middle of the West Leeds schoolhouse, called the western side of that wall the V. A. Deane High School, and installed a teacher to offer a two-year course in English, Math, History, Science, Latin and French. When scholars had finished that course, the town once more provided them with tuition to proceed to private academies for their junior and senior years. Even after 1911, however, some of Leeds' wealthier students paid tuition for the privilege of a private school education after eighth grade. As one parent who by-passed V.A. Deane explains, the local course proved to be of such dubious educational worth that the private academies sometimes accorded its graduates only one year's credit for two years' work.

Graduation from eighth grade thus sent Leeds' teenagers travelling in many different directions. While some went straight to work on the farms and roads of the town, others went briefly to V.A. Deane or were scattered to the four winds: north to Kent's Hill, west to Leavitt, east to Monmouth or, most rarely, south to the schools of Lewiston or Portland.

But wherever they went, Leeds' boys and girls began moving further than mere feet could carry them. Once teenagers got their hands on the family wagon or Model-T, they started going all sorts of places; indeed, according to the records of Edwin Clifford, they seldom stopped. A young man of Leeds Center in the late nineteenth century, Clifford recorded in his diary an endless round of visits, teas, hymn sings and dances. The events themselves were well-chaperoned affairs, but Clifford and company took full advantage of the more private moments spent getting places. "Our driving outfit, which I liked to refer to as 'mine', was quite popular, and the girls seldom refused to ride with me," Clifford wrote in a later memoir. "Old Bill was a wise old horse—I am sure he knew by the touch of my hands on the reins whether I was in a hurry or not and he was ever ready to respond to the inspiration." For those who had no driving outfit at their disposal, long walks along local roads afforded some privacy as well, with results that were sometimes less than innocent. One warm evening in the 1870s, two young men of Leeds fought for the privilege of

escorting Clara Beals back home to Quaker Ridge after a hymn sing. In the "Fatal Affray" which followed, one boy bit the other on the finger. The bitten boy took to his bed, and there he died—much to the dismay of his attacker, who soon found himself standing trial for murder.

Sometimes violent, more often peaceful, the roads of Leeds were a world unto themselves for the town's young men and women, who spent much of their youth moving along them. As now, so then: adolescence was in many ways a world of movement for movement's sake alone, a world whose boundaries seemed made to be broken.

While the adolescent body began making inroads within Leeds, the adolescent mind began travelling beyond the borders of the town altogether. Leeds children seldom left Androscoggin County, much less the state of Maine; nor had they televisions on which to view the rest of the world. Yet they grew up with a deep desire for the larger continent of life, if with little actual experience of it—and many, it seems, envisioned that continent as their own future home. When, as a boy, Edwin Clifford moved to Leeds from another small Maine town named Benton, he was surprised by the tendency of his peers to look beyond their immediate circumstances. "I found an entirely new viewpoint among the young people and citizens of the town," he later remarked. "The boys and girls were getting an education and looking beyond the woods and river-driving."

That tendency "to look beyond" had at least some of its roots in economic necessity. By the turn of the century, Leeds had little to offer its young men and women in the way of a living. Its small family farms could compete with neither the agricultural advantages of Western lands nor the varied and salaried job opportunities of Eastern cities. Indeed, since the time of the Civil War, the sons and daughters of Leeds and of other New England towns had emigrated in droves to lands of greater promise. More than half the adult sons and daughters listed in a 1905 census for Leeds no longer lived in the town; likewise, the U.S. census for 1910 reported that twenty-seven percent of people born in Maine and still alive were residing in some other state.

Faced with the double loss of its economic self-esteem and its younger generation, Leeds, like many other New England towns, made a virtue of necessity: it cultivated an image of itself as a "hometown," a growing ground for citizens of "superior spheres" beyond its borders. As several Centennial Celebration speakers pointed out, Leeds' number-one crop was neither corn nor cattle but children, raised in local fields and destined for the larger American marketplace. "They can do many things in the West that we can't do here," admitted one speaker, Frank Herrick. "They can raise more corn and wheat, more cattle and horses. But they never have nor ever will raise better boys and girls or make any better citizens of them than we do here in our little town of Leeds." Herrick's image of "our little town," at once proud and self-deprecating, was echoed in the very theme of the Centennial Celebra-

tion: "Old Home Week." During that week, as a local writer described it, "from every point of the compass. . . sons and daughters hastened to do honor to the soil of their birth."

In the image of a "hometown, Leeds sought a new sense of self-worth, a new use for its "soil." But that image condoned and perhaps even encouraged the continued exodus of its young people. As Herrick went on to suggest in his speech, by the turn of the century the departure of young people had become a rite of passage rather than an act of revolt. "Many of us can recall the time when first we left the parental roof and went out into the world to try and better our conditions," he told the audience of Old Home Week. "We can remember distinctly our feelings as we took our brother and sisters, our father and mother by the hand and bade them goodbye and heard them say, as they placed a parting kiss on our lips, 'Be a good boy.'" In a town which saw itself as an "old home," coming of age naturally culminated in that rite of passage into the world beyond—that moment when, with a parting kiss, young men and women opened the door in the high walls of their world and went through it, to start a life someplace else.

Just like the farmer and the city supermarket, so too the hometown and the world beyond its borders: interaction was largely limited to the moment of transaction. The door opened, the young person passed through it, the door swung shut—and the few who chose to stay behind settled down to raise new children and crops of their own in the fields of Leeds. As youth tapered into adulthood, these remaining young men and women took over the family farm, or found one of their own nearby. They married their neighbors—sometimes their own cousins. They raised a new brood of children in the rooms that had seen them born, and they sent those children to the schools they had attended, even to the same teachers. Now tied closely to one spot by farm chores and children, they traded in the road shows of youth for a more stationary stage: the local neighborhood. This new stage was slightly different from that of their childhood; its nucleus had shifted from schoolhouse to post office and general store. But Leeds adults shared their new stage with the old cast of characters carried over from school days. On that narrow stage, with that now familiar cast, they acted out the rest of their lives. And, as we shall see, they did it before an ever-present audience: their own neighbors.



The stage was set for intimacy from the start of a Leeds' person's life. While the quality of formal education varied greatly from district to district, scholars invariably learned a great deal about those sharing the common ground of their schoolhouse. Enclosed for the better part of eight years in a single room with brothers and sisters, buddies and bullies, they explored one another's strengths and exploited one another's weaknesses, quickly discerned the teacher's faults and more slowly absorbed her talents. The schoolhouse provided four walls: within them, children created their own complex world, their own hierarchy—even their own rituals for initiation. Bernice Gould Day Cushman, now eighty-eight years old, still recalls with

a shiver her own brisk initiation into that world. It was the spring of 1896 and Bernice was "new," so Ruth and Ruby Whitehouse decided to give her a proper welcome. During recess they located a deep pool of freshly melted snow, pushed Bernice into it, and held her there for a while. The baptized girl returned cold and shaking to the classroom, only to be sent straight home to bed by her teacher (and aunt) Alice Gould, and kept there for several weeks with a deadly case of pneumonia. All in all, a rather ominous first day in the schoolhouses of Leeds.

The teacher's position in this isolated world of school was a tenuous one. Without a principal down the hall, without even a telephone on which to summon the parents of "problems," she had to make the most of her own physical presence to create an atmosphere of authority. If she failed, the students quickly seized control and the teachers sometimes quite literally went out the window. Every school had its share of "big boys," who got their education in bits and pieces by coming and going for a term at a time; by the eighth grade, these big boys were often much bigger than the teacher—and a great deal wiser about the ways of the schoolhouse world. "If the big boys didn't like a teacher, why, they'd put him out and lock the door," says schoolhouse veteran Cad Morris, "and the district would have to send them another. Leeds Center down there, one teacher refused to go out, so the big boys opened a window, dropped him out of it onto the grass." Sometimes the wood stove went out the window as well; other times, students would plug up its chimney with snow or sprinkle its hot surface with pepper, two equally effective ways of shortening the school day.

Many of Leeds' more transient teachers were Bates College students working their way through school, students well-trained in math or music but novices in big-boy management. Bernice Gould Day Cushman watched six such teachers come and go, in the space of a single term at the Leeds Center School. But the town had some tenacious teachers as well—vocal local women who were willing to wield the whip, or better yet, "used psychology" to keep their scholars in line. Eula Russell Turner Carville, whose twenty-five year teaching career in Leeds is legend, developed an idiosyncratic system of humiliation and reward. She made lifelong friends of some students, and lifelong enemies of others; in the process she managed to teach most of them something of her two particular talents, horticulture and history. Unfortunately, writing was not one of her talents; hence many a generation of Leeds children emerged from Eula's classroom knowing the names of presidents and wind-flowers by heart, but unable to create a complex sentence.

Such was the world of the one-room schoolhouse, intimate and isolated. When Leeds' young men and women emerged from that world at the end of eighth grade, they were often trained in the talents of their teachers; and they were always experts in the personalities of their peers.

The schoolhouses was not the sole educator in human nature; however; the neighborhood shared that function. Confined to the pedestrian terrain of their neighborhood, the boys and girls of Leeds absorbed the talents of neighbors as much as of

teachers; they came to know their elders as intimately as their peers. When school ended for the day or summer, scholars returned to the local neighborhood, where they had no television world awaiting them, no video games offering cosmic escape, and few store-bought toys with which to while away the hours. Instead they made their own fun—and they made it out of the people and places at hand. Young Lester Merrill, for instance, carefully catalogued the culinary virtues of his North Leeds neighbors and then scheduled his visits to suit his appetite. Mrs. Curtis of Harvey Hill was a ‘nice old lady’ with even nicer pears, in season. Sarah McGuire of North Road made donuts twice a week, and Lester soon learned to look in on baking day—until his mother caught him at it and wrapped a whip around his ankles every step of the way home. When hungry for stories instead of sweets, Lester went to see Sarah’s father in the next house down from the McGuire place. While old Billy Gray told stories from his Civil War days, Lester could, at leisure, inspect the veteran’s interesting toes: Billy had frozen them in the Battle of the Wilderness, causing the nails to rise in cones through the holes of his ancient boots.

The children who lived in Leeds Center had no Billy Gray to study, but they did have the town blacksmith, John Collins, to watch at work. Collins apparently didn’t mind young visitors in his shop: he even encouraged them, by making runners for the children’s homemade sleds. Collins’ neighbor Doc Russell was always going somewhere fast; on the way, though, he sometimes stopped his Model-T to give neighborhood children a tour of its strange surfaces and a toot of its horn. The older children retaliated for Doc’s kind exhibitions with a less kind exhibition of their own. Every fourth of July they put the old town hearse on his lawn—a rather cruel tribute to a man whose business was, quite literally, life and death. But Doc eventually went them one better and had his own gang dump the hearse in the Androscoggin River. Doc Russell may have been the busiest man in town, but he was also a neighbor—and no neighbor, however, harried, escaped the games Leeds’ children played.



Whether making mischief in the schoolhouse or neighbor’s house, Leeds boys and girls had in their playful way begun the work of a lifetime: the construction of their world from those who shared common ground. As adults they would continue building that world, reshaping the human clay gathered from common ground to meet many needs, both public and private. Just as children made their own fun, adults made their own institutions and recreations; and, in the process, they got to know their neighbors very well.

Present-day residents have easy and reliable access to a public world beyond Leeds: the shopping malls, hospitals, professional services and recreational facilities of local cities like Lewiston-Auburn and Augusta. The same public world, in less sophisticated form, lay beyond Leeds’ borders in 1901—but the transportation and communications systems of the time forced Leeds people to live independently of it. That independence is nicely summarized, in its causes and effects, by a childhood

memory of Leeds Center farmer Gib Buckley. It was a Monday morning in the fall of 1933, and the Buckley family was making its annual excursion to Lewiston to buy shoes for the coming year. Gib's father Guy steered his sons onto the train at Leeds Center and guided them off at Lewiston, where, as usual, they went straight to the bank to get spending money. But the bank doors were locked and hung with a sign saying, simply, "CLOSED." After consulting memory to make sure it really was Monday, and not Sunday after all, the Buckleys wandered down the street and learned from a gas station attendant that President Roosevelt had declared a bank holiday. Guy Buckley traded the attendant some unremembered item for fifteen dollars, pocketed the money and took the children home. Today, as Gibb says, "we would know the news before it happened." But then we would have to know, because we have come to depend upon banks and their bullion to make our very world go round. The Buckleys' world kept on going round without any bank: the children wore last year's shoes and their parents put the fifteen dollars aside for emergency use. Gib's recollection captures nicely the cash-scarce quality of life in the 1930s; it also indicates the way in which the daily isolation of Leeds people forced them to live independently of the public life and institutions of places like Lewiston.

Rather than rely on that invisible and often intangible world beyond their borders, Leeds people met their most basic needs within their own neighborhoods. And here, too, within the town limits, people lacked the resources we now take for granted. The public buildings of present-day Leeds—the post office, elementary school, medical center, telephone company—seem like fixed features of the landscape, as eternal and self-sustaining as the White Mountains to the west. Postal clerks, doctors, and repairmen may come and go, but we presume that the services they provide will live on, performed by someone else. Turn-of-the-century Leeds made no such presumptions, for it had few separate public institutions outlasting the passing generations. Instead it had inspired individuals who, for love, curiosity, or the little money that could be made, met local needs in the space of their own homes. The town had no banks—but it did have the Deane brothers, from whom Leeds people could "hire money" at high interest rates. The town had no medical center—but it did have Doc Russell, who provided the town and surrounding region with health care for more than seventy years, performing operations in patients' homes and doing more routine work in the office on the ground floor of his own house; he even delivered a baby on his kitchen table. Leeds had no separate telephone building or twenty-four hour switchboard—but it did have Flora Hewins, who ran the telephone switchboard out of her own bedroom for twenty-five years. And Leeds had no bars or bingo tables—but it did have Bill Burgess, who ran a men's clubhouse by the railroad tracks in Leeds Center. Burgess spent his summers working in cornfields and his falls working in the cornshop; during his idle winter days, however, he always went over to the clubhouse in the afternoons, swept it out and lit a fire to warm the bodies of men drifting in after evening chores for a game of pool and the local gossip. The clubhouse was not a business: it sat on no man's land and made no man any money. But it gave Bill Burgess something to do and the local men someplace to go. When Burgess died, the clubhouse died with him, its neglected walls gradually caving in to bury the pool table beneath them.

Bill Burgess was that clubhouse. So too, Doc Russell was local health care and Flora Hewins was local telephone service. The individual became the institution, and his or her home a public place. Indeed, in a town where one went up to the neighbors to take out a loan, roused Flora from bed to put in an emergency call, and gave birth to babies on Doc Russell's kitchen table, there could be no clear line between "public" and "private." The town house in Leeds Center, which housed town documents and hosted the annual town meeting, was an exception of sorts—an anonymous public ground outlasting each generation of public servants. Perhaps because of its very anonymity, however, the selectmen did not keep offices or hours at that town house but did town business in the privacy of their own homes. Public life took place on private property—and so, as we shall see, private lives naturally became public property.

While many of Leeds' public services were the work of one person, others were the cooperative venture of many. The "cooperative," which has in recent years been revived in the form of food purchasing co-ops and farmers' co-ops, is in fact an age-old rural tradition—a natural form of organization for persons living in a world of limited resources. Leeds' first and most enduring cooperatives were its school districts. Organized in the first year of town life, 1801, the district system gave residents near-complete fiscal and administrative responsibility for their area schoolhouse. The township elected overseers of the system, in the form of a school committee, a supervisor and, later, a superintendent: these overseers in turn appointed agents to visit each school once a term and make written reports. The function of the overseers and agents was largely evaluative, however. Decisions about budget, teaching staff, and school repairs remained the responsibility of the district residents themselves. Early each spring, these neighbors met in the schoolhouse to make the necessary decisions for the coming year, from the most fundamental to the most frivolous. After calculating the number of scholars in the district, they voted whether to open the schoolhouse at all; if the ayes had it, they voted on the teacher's salary and made bids for her board; they considered complaints about student vandalism—and did so in the presence of the vandal's parents; they grudgingly volunteered to make free repairs on the buildings and much more enthusiastically bid for the paying jobs of janitor and wood supplier; they even discussed the proper paint shade for the new coat of schoolhouse trim.

The teacher and schoolhouse were thus directly at the mercy of those who had to pay for their upkeep. As a result, both sometimes suffered. For better and worse, however, the district system brought neighbors together, to meet and listen to one another, on the shared ground of the neighborhood school. In 1893, the Maine state legislature banished the district system and centralized all decision making in town offices, in an effort to assure a greater equality of educational opportunity within one township. Leeds parents could still cast their vote for the education budget for the township as a whole, at the annual town meeting in March. Yet the shift from neighborhood to community-wide control seems to have struck them as a loss, rather than gain, of domain. As Superintendent Frank Herrick noted eight years after the law had taken effect, "A great many people felt that their right to act in school affairs had

been taken from them, and consequently their interest in the school was lost." Voluntary teacher-parent associations sprang up in an effort to recapture that interest, and Herrick formally invited all parents to visit their child's schoolhouse, with as many as 197 accepting the invitation in a single year. While parents might go to school once annually to listen to the teacher, however, they no longer had to listen to one another.

Thus neighborhoods lost one common ground for encounter and cooperation. The new times and technologies of the twentieth century created new needs, however, and Leeds people pooled limited resources to meet them. When telephones came to town at the turn of the century, residents greeted them with understandable enthusiasm. Between 1900 and 1909, the town freely handed out permits to companies and individuals alike, for "the raising of poles and stringing of wires;" and in 1910 several enterprising citizens decided to create a company of their own. The object of the Leeds Telephone Association was "to facilitate communication by and between the various residents in the town of Leeds." Its strategy for doing so was, for lack of outside capital, highly cooperative. Townspeople purchased stock at twenty dollars a share, bought their own machines and batteries, and provided the labor for their own telephone service and repairs. For the next fifty years, the telephone company was not a faceless monolith to be dealt with by mail; it wore the very familiar face of one's neighbor and was dealt with in very public meetings. As many as five times a year, townspeople met "to see what could be done" about rising costs and declining service. They organized into neighborhood teams to repair their own exchanges free of charge; they voted to assess their own stock, in order to raise maintenance funds; they voted to cut the lines of neighbors who were two months in arrears; and they faced lawsuits brought by neighbors for property damaged by falling wires. Despite the official language in which the minutes of these LTA meetings are dressed, they manage to communicate the intricate intimacies of small town public life—the frustrations, compromises, and generosity of a group of people who knew each other's limits all too well, and who were trying to make the most of their pooled strengths to provide a community service.

Neighbors came together on less sober occasions as well. In pursuit not only of public service but of pleasure, Leeds people lacked easy access to resources beyond their own neighborhood reach. A family of means might take a weekend trip to Lewiston-Auburn to see the sights—if someone else was paid or willing to stay home and tend the farm. The Grange at Leeds Center offered a regular Saturday fare of bean suppers, dances and dramatics, but for those who did not live in Leeds Center it was an offer contingent on travelling conditions. And even with kind weather and the home front covered, these were at most weekly excursions. For more daily diversion from their work-a-day world, Leeds adults looked closer to home. Like their own children, they made their fun out of the materials within reach: the homes and talents of their neighbors.

Home itself offered little in the way of diversionary tactics. On the small family farm, one's home was one's work-a-day world. After a long day's work,

Leeds people did not leave the factory or office behind; they remained surrounded by the demanding sights and sounds of farm and family. Until television came along in the 1950s, they could not simply tune out the demands by tuning in to another world on the screen. But they could turn the doorknob and enter another world down the road: their neighbor's house. Visiting was a well-established way of life, with neighbors drifting in and out of each other's kitchens as casually as clouds, helping each other while away winter afternoons and long summer evenings. Callers seldom announced their arrival beforehand; after all, people were usually home, and the neighborhood soon knew if they were not. On more formal occasions a few families—even an entire roadful—might descend on one house, casseroles and kids in hands, to tuck the food in their mouths, the children into spare beds, and then play whist to the crackle of the radio. Hard cider, rather than cards, often inspired a neighborly call. Just as young Lester Merrill arranged his visits around his appetite, so his thirstier elders knew where to go for a cup of "orchard tea."

For men, the road to a neighbor's house was not the only escape route. Leeds Center men could spend evenings down at the local clubhouse, thanks to Bill Burgess; but nearly every neighborhood had a casual clubhouse in the shape of a general store, each with its own special brand of entertainment. At the West Leeds store, proprietor Perry Grant sold a brand of Jamaican Ginger whose alcohol content made it a highly popular item. Every winter a few imbibers had to be rescued from snowbanks by neighbors, and carried into the nearest house to thaw out and sober up. At the Waite's store in Leeds Center, the men made their fun by making fun of one another. Edson Waite, the proprietor's son, offers a sample of the entertainment. "They used to collect there at night," he says, "and once they had those backbreaker rat traps. Luke Burnham set it and told Billy Burnham that if he was quick enough he could trip it and not get caught. Luke kept after him and finally Billy did it—got it right across his hand, hurt his fingers." But Billy got the last word. "There," he said to his triumphant kinsman. "Now you've got to cut wood all by yourself tomorrow."

Thus another story was born, to be circulated through the air in future evenings at the Waite general store. Other favorite pastimes included putting epsom salts in someone's cider or passing around laxative tablets disguised as candied mints—and then watching the unwitting ones beat a path to the outhouse. The child is, indeed, the father of the man. As boys, they had passed their time playing tricks on their neighbors; as adults they continued on their merry way, only the locale was now the store instead of the schoolhouse.

For the woman of turn-of-the-century Leeds, there were no single-sex clubhouses or evening gatherings at the general store when work was done—for a woman's work could not so easily be left behind. In a cash-scarce economy, hired baby-sitters were a rare luxury. Children went where Mother went, unless she had a reliable relative living at home. Youngsters were expected at community gatherings and accommodated in a variety of ways; when the Grange had a supper or dance, for instance, the older children were herded into a back room and the babies laid out in

chairs on the stage to preside noisily over the occasion. But even if a woman had no offspring, she usually had a husband on whom she had to depend for transportation. The roads and reins were a man's domain, and so unless he agreed to go along, the married woman seldom left the local neighborhood. Millie Libby had been an avid Granger until she married Raleigh Knapp of North Leeds. Then she simply stopped going—until Rawl joined the Patrons of Husbandry and went with her. Women might get together in the midday hours for a sewing bee or canning session, while their husbands were at work and their children at school; but an evening's entertainment was inevitably a family affair for them. It is little wonder that the women of Leeds organized "Ladies' Circles" and "Ladies' Aid Societies" which promoted community suppers and family socials. The meetings got them together during the days and the entertainments got them out of the house at night. Just as Bill Burgess did his male neighbors a favor by running a clubhouse at Leeds Center, so Rosa Hanscom did her own sex a favor down in South Leeds. In the spring of 1891 her women's association designed and raised funds for a community hall at Keen's Corner, with a kitchen downstairs, a large room for entertainment upstairs—and no pool table on the premises.

Lucky was the sociable woman of Keen's Corner; she had Rosa Hanscom for a neighbor. Lucky, too, the pool-playing man of Leeds Center; he had Bill Burgess nearby. But pity the Leeds Center lady left home alone and the Keen's Corner man with a penchant for shooting pool. In these isolated hamlets of life collectively called "Leeds," one's neighbors shaped one's own opportunities. Not dogs, but neighbors, were a man's best friend; not diamonds, but neighbors, a woman's.



Loving thy neighbor is no easy task. As the great American cynic Ambrose Bierce wrote, a neighbor is "one whom we are commanded to love as ourselves, and who does all he knows how to make us disobedient." The people of turn-of-the-century Leeds had many good reasons to try to love their neighbors, though. Not only did they need neighbors for the sake of public services and recreation; they also needed neighbors for the sake of survival.

Life on the small family farm cultivated two contradictory qualities in its residents: an independence of spirit and an interdependence of action. Leeds men and women had to be independently minded to plan the patterns of their own fields and days—and, for the most part, they had to settle for the satisfaction of independence. Their work was seldom lucrative or leisurely: if successful, however, it did secure a high degree of self-sufficiency. Leeds people thus naturally prided themselves on their independence of others. But the flip side of self-sufficiency is extreme vulnerability. By putting all their eggs into one basket—their work into one farm, their livestock into one barn, their fodder into one silo, their food into one cellar—the townspeople fell easy prey to sudden and sweeping losses. And the world in which they lived abounded with disasters at every turn of the calendar page. One kick from a frisky cow in spring could disable a farmer for the entire growing season; if the

farmer escaped such accidents, an unseasonable summer could kill crops in the fields where they lay—and the Maine sky is a marvelously capricious one, capable of delivering two feet of snow on the fourth of July or refusing to rain for a month at a time. But even if the farmer stayed healthy and the weather kind, even if the fruits of one's labor found their way safely into cellar and silo, fire could come like a thief in the night and make off with everything. Small farm families put all their eggs in a weak-bottomed basket, indeed—and many did so without the safety net of bank savings or insurance beneath them.

Instead of safety nets, however, Leeds residents had a safety network of neighbors. When a family was struck down by fire or illness, neighbors "turned to" with everything from clothing to cash, food to labor. The term "turning to", indigenous to rural New England, reflects the extent to which neighborly assistance was the rule instead of the exception. In the larger lexicon of American life, one "turns to" others in search of support. In the lexicon of Leeds, one "turns to" with support for others. The victim need not ask to receive: the neighbor knows to give.

The meaning of vulnerability was nowhere more manifest, and the meaning of "turning to" nowhere better expressed, than in the case of fire. Turn-of-the-century Leeds was a veritable tinderbox, its summer skies lively with lightening, its barns full of highly combustible materials like new hay, its houses warmed through long winters with woodburning stoves—and the New England penchant for connected farm buildings meant that when one building went, the others seldom stood intact. Frequent fires were a natural result of these conditions: of nineteen houses standing on North Road in 1912, for instance, nine have since burned to the ground. The fact that fires were commonplace, however, did not make them any less tragic in their consequences. All in the course of a very ordinary day, flames could suddenly consume a family's past, present and future—the artifacts of their past, the sustenance of their present, and the foundations for their future. Ida Morris lit a fire in the kitchen stove one morning to make breakfast biscuits. Nothing unusual about that—she did it every morning—until the stove chimney caught fire and burned down the house around it. Harley Gray went out in his yard one afternoon to start a grass bonfire. Nothing unusual about that—until a sudden wind blew the flames up North Road, burning down the McGuire place next door, while the Gray place stood unsigned. Lot Howard and his son Millet went for a ride one Sunday afternoon. Nothing unusual about that, either—until they spotted smoke on the way home and, stopping at the general store to inquire, found out that the burning farm was their own. A lightening bolt had struck a steel fork in hay-filled barn, starting a fire that would take every building on the place.

Once a fire started, there was, in fact, little that one could do to stop it. Until 1909, Leeds had never appropriated town funds for fire-fighting, much less organized its own fire department—for there was no way to notify firemen that they were needed. The installation of telephones in town improved matters somewhat: now a victim could go to a phone and tell the selectmen about the fire. But the most the selectmen could do was "authorize the fire" for the fiscal record and then call in

another town's fire department to come to the rescue. In truth, this arrangement only added fuel to the fire, by giving the flames time to spread. When the Willis Gould place caught fire in 1932, it backfired in more ways than one. The burning house was adjoined to the barn, so while neighbors ripped off the connecting shed roof with crow bars, the selectmen authorized the fire. Then they called the Wayne fire department and told them there was a fire at the Gould place on Route 219. Unfortunately, Route 219 had more than one Gould place at the time. The Wayne trucks got as far as the Paul Gould place, saw no smoke and went home. Meanwhile, Willis Gould's hired hands had decided that the barn was bound to burn, so they led out the livestock and then sawed off the barn stanchions in order to salvage the tie chains. While they were busy sawing, the Livermore Falls fire department arrived and began pumping water from the Dead River to douse the flames. The barn was saved and the animals invited back in—but, much to the disgrace of the well-meaning farm hands, there were no stanchions left with which to tie them.

Despite this calamity of errors, however, Willis Gould was lucky: he still had a shed, although it was now roofless, and a barn, although it was now full of unhitched and slightly unhinged cattle. Few of Leeds' other fire victims were so fortunate. Most got away with only the clothes on their backs, to watch a lifetime of labor go up in smoke.

Bitter memories of loss from fire abound in Leeds' history. And yet, such memories are often accompanied by a sweeter remembrance of the ways neighbors turned to. Someone might start a cash collection and get a dollar or two from every house on the road. (Unless, of course, they shared the same road with one wealthy Leeds farmer who kept a twenty-dollar bill on hand for collections of this sort. When the collector could not make change, the farmer safely pocketed the bill again, always throwing in a sympathetic shake of the head.) Meanwhile, Leeds women would go rummaging for canned goods in their cellars and conjuring up casseroles in their kitchens, to feed the burned-out family.

Cash collections and casseroles are still a regular response to the fire down the road. We may no longer know our neighbor's particular lifestyle and needs, but we know the human condition well enough to assume that cash and food will come in handy. In the more intimate days of Leeds, however, residents knew the needs of neighbors much better, and they turned to in ways that reflected that knowledge. When the Morris place caught fire, the family was fortunate enough to have another old house on their property: within a week, neighbors had dug up enough attic odds and ends to furnish it from top to bottom. When the Lane place on North Road burned in 1922, the family had no second home awaiting them, so the neighbors provided that as well; the Millets up the road gave them an empty house, and local farmers brought teams and chains to the task of moving it over a winterscape of stone walls and snow. For the Howards, a house was less important than a well-stocked barn. They had been left with a few head of cattle, but no hay or hayloft. Then Guy Buckley went to Millet Howard and said, "Buy the hay on the Carver place." Millet had no way to cut or store it—but Guy kept after him until Millet had

bought that Carver hay anyway. Then Guy had his crew cut and store it in one of his own barns; and blacksmith John Collin made the job easier for everyone by lending a Herculean hand.

Thus everyone gave according to their ability. Buckley had the barn to spare, and Collins the muscle power to move it. The Millets had a house to spare, and their neighbors the horse power to move it. Each act of turning to was unique—but together they tell us how clearly Leeds people knew the needs of their neighbors, and how closely they could meet them.

Neighbors not only helped pick up after disaster had struck, however. Their presence in daily life helped prevent many disasters in the first place. Confined to a small area of activity, Leeds people knew that area inside out; they formed a detailed picture of each neighbor's habits, and when something went wrong with that picture they quickly discerned it. If an elderly neighbor did not emerge for her morning constitutional, watchful neighbors were likely to notice and find out the cause. So too, if smoke from a local chimney looked unusually thick, they were quick to inquire: a neighbor's fire, after all, might soon be one's own. And because Leeds had no fire department, neighbors often went to the rescue themselves. When the Parcher place on Campbell road caught fire, Steven Knapp spotted the flames from his home on the other side of Dead River and promptly plunged in, clothes and all, to swim to the rescue. An even more heroic endeavor nearly cost Willis Phillips his life. In an effort to save cattle from the Bickford fire on Church Hill Road, he entered the burning barn; once inside, though, he could not find his way out in the smoke. The cattle finally saved Willis instead of the other way around; he grabbed onto a tail and let its owner lead him to safety. When the Hobbs place further down Church Hill burned, the neighbors could not save it: but they did rescue the house next door by breaking in and extinguishing a few travelling flames. (Afterwards, firefighter Doc Russell called the man of that house in Lewiston to let him know of the aid given—only to be scolded for his good deed. The house belonged to the man's wife, as it turned out, and they were not getting along at the time.)

Whether or not the help was appreciated, however, it was pretty much expected. Leeds people lived with their neighbors' eyes upon them—a watchfulness which precluded privacy but provided security. Neighborly presence was a kind of prescience, preventing accidents before they happened and keeping the crime rate down as well. According to Lester Merrill, his family had no locks on its doors until cars came to town. "You knew just about everyone around," he explains, "and if something turned up missing you knew pretty much who had done it." Lester and his neighbors undoubtedly took that kind of security for granted. Not until cars carried strangers to Leeds and let neighbors leave the homeplace more often did residents learn the value of the neighborly intimacy now lost—and taste a privacy they had never known.



Before cars came along, of course, telephones did; and they did away with some reasons for neighborliness. People could now call on the selectmen instead of their closest neighbors for help. But telephones provided a new ground for intimacy as well. Until 1960, Leeds people communicated with a hand-crank or magneto telephone system—a technological octopus, with a central switchboard for its brain and five party lines like tentacles extending outward. One line wound through West Leeds, a second found its way to North Road, a third gripped North Leeds, a fourth coiled around Leeds Center, and a fifth reached out to South Leeds. The crank system provided weak lines to the world beyond Leeds: conversations with people as close as Wayne often had to be carried on through the operator, who translated the static for the benefit of her callers. But the system did a better job of facilitating communication within the town—a better job, even, than its users intended. With as many as twenty-three parties sharing a single line, the phone became something of a public address system. One had only to pick up the phone and crank the proper combination of long and short rings to reach a neighbor down the road, free of cost—keeping in mind, of course, that the rings sounded in every house along the line, a summons to all eavesdroppers to pick up their receivers as well. Eavesdroppers could practice discrimination in their listening, too—for one could tell who the caller was just by the way they cranked the phone. Some people were curt with the crank, and others protracted; some made it tinkle and some made it clang.

The hand-crank system provided more than one way to learn the local news, however. Every word that travelled along its tentacles also went to the head of the octopus: the central switchboard. Operators had the moral option of tuning out, but the fact that “Central” was commonly considered a storehouse of local knowledge suggests that, more often than not, the operator tuned in. In Leeds as in other small towns of the hand-crank days, the operator was an expert on everything from gossip to guidance counseling. When young Alice Waite was trying to choose between the many high schools outside of Leeds, she consulted the Leeds switchboard, then conveniently located in her father’s store. “Kent’s Hill,” said the operator, and so to Kent’s Hill went Alice. Even though it was the academy furthest from home, Alice trusted the operator to know what she was talking about—or rather, what everyone else was talking about.

In 1935, the switchboard moved from the Waites’ store to the bedroom of the Hewins home in West Leeds, to be tended for the next twenty-five years by Flora “Central” Hewins. Central’s job was to keep that switchboard open from six in the morning until nine at night, along with handling any emergency calls in the off hours. The job was a tasking one, but Flora Hewins had the dedication it demanded. While any small town operator necessarily plays an important part in moments of emergency, when the doctor or minister or selectman is needed right away, Flora always went beyond that initial call of duty. If she sought-for someone wasn’t home, she plugged in her switches and asked around, and she didn’t give up until she had chased that person down and relayed her message. In matters of daily life as well, Flora showed unusual dedication: she kept track of any old message if asked to—or rather, unless asked not to. Leeds people learned to use her as their own answering

machine. "I don't know how many times I called Flora when I got home and found out who had been calling me—as if she had no one else to look after," says Louise Sanders, with some guilt, "but Flora was always so good-natured about it." In such a system, no news was private news. "Anybody wanted to know anything, they'd call up Flora, she'd tell them," emphasizes Myrtis Pillsbury, adding after a moment's reflection, "It was really pretty pagan. But nobody minded."

Such a system might seem pagan today, when privacy is considered something of a sacred right. In the days of "Central," however, privacy was impractical if not downright impossible. Nobody minded, as Myrtis puts it—and if they did mind, their only option was to cut their own telephone lines. The temptation to do so was severe at times, since the phone cost people not only their privacy but their hard-earned pennies. The records of the Leeds Telephone Association are full of resolutions to do away with the telephone system altogether: but the resolutions never passed, for the simple reason that, as one stockholder summed it up, "no one wants to be without a phone in case of fire, etc." Leeds people quickly grew accustomed to the security of a telephone system and, once accustomed, they found both pennies and patience to put up with it. If they were going to combat the perils of life in isolation, they needed to be within reach of their doctors, their selectmen, and their nearest and dearest salvation—neighbors. They liked to know where these people were; that made them feel safe. They also liked to know what these people were doing; that made life interesting. And one kind of information came hand in hand with the other, all in the handy form of Leeds' own "Central."



This, then, was turn-of-the-century Leeds: a community of people so intimately bound up with each other that one's life, one's home, even one's telephone conversations were public property. The town was not without its hermits: but those who chose to keep to themselves had to struggle against the town's intrusive habits. No one struggled harder than Julia Griswold Berry. The daughter of a widowed sea captain, herself widowed when young, Julia learned early how to live alone, and apparently she liked it; for she chose to spend the last sixty-one years of her life on an island in the Androscoggin River. This decision caused a great deal of distress to neighbors along both banks. First of all, Berry was a woman, and, in a world which defined women by their domestic relationships (as wife, mother, maiden aunt), her decision to live outside of any such defining relationship was unacceptable and even threatening. Second, she was an eccentric woman, who kept her chickens in the kitchen instead of the coop and wore burlap sacks instead of proper dresses; like any small town, Leeds had little tolerance for such socially unacceptable behavior. Finally, she chose to live that way in isolation—and, in a town where intimacy was the way of life, such isolation seemed dangerous, even subversive.

So, for more than half a century, Julia Griswold Berry and the people of Leeds played a slow game of tug-of-war, with the hermit lady, implacably content, holding

onto one end of the rope, and her neighbors, implacably concerned, pulling away at the other end, trying to pull Berry off her island and back onto the common—and controlling—ground of community life. Her obituary notice gives us a colorful, if slightly biased, history of the war. "For years she has lived in the miserable hovel she called home," begins the obituary, "and has been an object of pity and compassion. Neighbors from both sides of the river were continually carrying her good things to eat and wear." Compassion is sometimes a disguise for strategies of conformity—but Berry was a brilliant strategist, too. She accepted their "good things," but thwarted their "good intentions" by putting the food and clothes to her own peculiar uses: the food was fed to her chickens; the clothes were draped on wall pegs and the backs of rickety old chairs. The neighbors came bearing opinions as well as gifts; they tried to make her see that what "she called home" was no home at all but a "miserable hovel." Berry handled their opinions as adroitly as their gifts. "Begrimed with dirt and smoke," continues the obituary, "she always received such guests with a welcome smile and assured them that she was happy and contented with her lot." Not that they believed her. The townspeople of Leeds and Turner persisted with their pulls and tugs until finally, during one especially cold winter, Berry's feet froze, and she could hold her ground no longer. Neighbors carried her off Griswold Island and to the Turner town farm where, "after heroic treatment under the guidance of a trained nurse," the diseased parts were amputated—and the hermit, unable to walk away, took the only escape route left: she died.

Julia Griswold Berry's mind was its own place. To the extent that she cultivated it as a citadel against the incursions of others, she found privacy. But her mind was the only private place she had: neither her home, her habits, nor, finally, her life, belonged entirely to her, to do with as she would. In towns like turn-of-the-century Leeds, no person could be an island—even if she lived on one.

Berry's battle of wills with her neighbors was an unusual one because Berry was an unusual woman—one who took her taste for independence to an extreme. But the taste for independence was not in itself unusual. It was naturally cultivated by a small-farm world which made autonomy of mind a necessity and independence of spirit a virtue. And yet, as we have seen, the isolation and insecurity of that world also required neighborly interdependence. While Berry tried to escape to an island, most Leeds people did not try to escape at all. Instead, they brought their independent minds to bear on the task of building a world together on their common ground. The results of these efforts were sometimes constructive, sometimes disastrous, and always dramatic. In Robert Frost's poem "Mending Wall," a New England farmer likes to repeat to the man next door his father's saying, "good fences make good neighbors." The farmer won't explain the maxim, but neither will he surrender it—and he has good reasons to hang onto it. Given the highly interdependent structure of rural society, good neighbors were indispensable; given the highly independent spirit of rural people, good fences were equally indispensable. As the old saying goes and Leeds people learned time and again, "good fences make good neighbors"—for without good fences, the common ground all too often became a collision course.

If one were to survey the landscape of Leeds for signs of past collision, the eye might easily overlook Church Hill and the two meetinghouses which, until recently, stood side by side atop it. Of distinct yet complementary design (the Baptist building, no longer standing, was wide, squat and single-spired, while the Universalist, which still remains, is tall, lean and twice-towered), they wore the same shade of pristine white, shared the same hillcrest and scenic view, and ostensibly carried the same message of neighborly love to the world around them. The two buildings suggested tolerance, rather than conflict, co-existence rather than collision. But appearances can be deceptive. These two churches came to stand side by side, not because they could share common ground peacefully, but precisely because they could not.

Their troubled story takes us back to the early nineteenth-century days of Leeds. The Baptists and Universalist societies of the time had plenty of doctrinal ground on which to differ. The Baptists espoused selective salvation, available only through baptism and conversion, while the Universalists offered salvation to one and all, regardless of creed or spiritual condition. To the Baptists, the Universalists seemed overly generous with God's grace; to the Universalists, the Baptists were downright stingy. Yet these doctrinal differences played little part in the great feud which arose between them; instead, the problem started with the practical business of sharing a single building.

Baptist meetings began in Leeds as early as 1794 and, in 1806, the society built itself a meeting house atop Church Hill (then known as Meeting House Hill). Universalism did not hit town until 1833; but when it did, its somewhat less stringent requirements for salvation found many a willing soul. With as many as two hundred people at a single service, the new society soon saw the need for a meeting house, too. In 1836, the Universalists and Baptists entered into an agreement, whereby the Universalists would own one-fourth of the Baptist building and have use of it every fourth Sunday. The agreement was remarkably good-willed, but it was also remarkably ambiguous—a dangerous quality, when two churches try to share a common ground. Several years into the agreement, the Baptists decided to tear out the building's pews and replace them with folding chairs. The Universalists objected strenuously; for, despite their doctrine of universality, Universalists of that time tended to be rather exclusive, and delighted in the status conferred by the ownership of private pews. Their Baptist brethren then reviewed the agreement and decided that the Universalists did not, after all, really own one-fourth of the building: they were only renting it. The Universalists, reduced from owners to tenants, soon found themselves locked out. But they were not to be exiled quite so quickly from the common ground. When the fourth Sunday of the month came around, they sent sexton Perry Grant over to break in and prepare the place for the way of their own Lord. Perry did his Christian duty—only to be sued for malicious trespass by the Baptist owners.

Long and bitter raged the feud; long and embattled ran the court case. Finally, in 1871, the Maine Supreme Court ruled in favor of the Baptists. The Univer-

salists, however, had been preparing for that possibility; they had purchased the plot of land right next door to the Baptist building and, in 1872, they constructed a meeting house upon it—a building taller than the Baptists', with twice as many spires and plenty of pews. Happily, the Baptists did not rise to the two-fingered provocation of their new neighbor and add a second tower of their own. Instead, the two societies chose to abide peacefully forthwith, side by side in their separate homes. Good fences had made them more godly neighbors—and only the lack of a fence, in the form of an clear and unambiguous agreement, had prevented them from being thus in the first place.

It took little to precipitate a feud, indeed—just a disputed piece of turf or unclear boundary. And in private as well as ecclesiastical property, Leeds sorely lacked clear property lines. As one local surveyor recently remarked, while puzzling over the boundaries of a Leeds client, "there were plenty of good surveyors around until about 1850. Then they all went west, and everyone sat around their kitchen table and swapped like crazy—what a mess." Even when land stayed within a single family, it had to be handed from one generation to the next. In the process, many a family feud began and many a grudge was born, to be carried all the way to the grave. While alive, some willful parents used the family property as a means of controlling their children—a device given local perfection by a certain T.A. Dascomb.

T.A. liked to have things his own way, and when he deeded his house to son George he wasn't about to let those things change. In his will of 1907, he signed the house over to George on the condition that his son continue to "suitably support and maintain the said T.A. Dascomb" in that house, by letting him "occupy the same bedroom he has also the two front rooms and one of the south chambers—also to furnish fitted firewood and to keep a team for said T.A. Dascomb." The distrustful father left no possibility untouched; he even specified that "in case of fire, a suitable house with comfortable rooms shall be provided." Eulogists of the 'extended family' like to wax nostalgic about the days of old, when several generations shared the same house. But what the eulogists forget, and T.A. Dascomb's will so bluntly reveals, is that those generations did not always manage it easily.

Whether or not they shared a house, Leeds people often had to share common ground of other kinds. Doc Russell recalled the encounter of one stubborn set of father and son, on a narrow road one winter day. The snowy roadside made passage difficult, and each one insisted on his own right of way—the son pointing to the load of logs in his wagon, the father demanding the respect due age. The son finally paid a tribute of sorts to his father's grey head. He climbed out of his wagon and led his horses off the road—but as the triumphant parent passed by, the son reached up and walloped him right on the top of his pate. In the same season of the year, but on a different road, two neighbors barely avoided blows in their own fight for the right of way. Millet Howard was hauling logs on the "Bog road," a winter path across the frozen swamp which made for excellent teaming—but which also ran across the property of Howard's pugnacious neighbor Will Carville. Carville let Howard's farm hand pass with one wagon, but he ordered his son Henry to cut a spruce tree,

which neatly fell across the road right in front of Howard's own team. When Howard had halted, Carville grabbed at his horses. "I had a broken leg at the time or I would have taken care of him right then and there," says Howard, still mad about it half a century later. Instead, he had to settle for brandishing a long whip and telling his neighbor, "If you do anything to my team, it will be the saddest day of your life." Carville thought that proposition over for a moment—and then ran to help Henry push the tree from the road. A good fence across Carville's road would never have made good neighbors of these two, but at least it might have helped them avoid one another. Whenever two willful men like Howard and Carville met on disputed ground, sparks were bound to fly.

Indeed, given the close quarters and the quantity of human dynamite in Leeds, it is a wonder that the town did not self-destruct long ago. But the instinct for survival is equally wonderful. Leeds people survived by making independence a state of mind and interdependence a state of being. As Julia Griswold Berry knew, the mind is its own place. And yet, as Will Carville and Millet Howard knew, a world of limited resources is everyone's place. The two neighbors stopped speaking to one another after the Bog road incident, but they continued to share their resources with one another. Howard needed Carville's road to haul logs—and Carville needed Howard's saw mill to cut logs. So long as they remained neighbors, Howard went teaming on Carville's land, and Carville sent his logs to Howard's mill, using his more amiable son as emissary. Carville even found words of praise for the miller's work, although of course he never said them to Howard's face.

Self-reliant to the point of self-righteousness, Leeds residents nonetheless lived interdependently—a paradox of life in an isolated farm town. In a poem written around the turn of the century, Quaker Ridge resident Ellen Partridge gives perfect, if unconscious, expression to this paradox. The moral she intends to impart is the virtue of the independent mind. Yet the story she tells to make her point is, in fact, one of interdependence.

There stood an old building on Maple Hill Farm
And the owner of it said to the place 'twas no charm.
He wished many times as he sat in his chair
To look out his window and find it not there.
The sills and the rafters were not very good,
And so he decided to sell—if he could.
He soon found a customer of courage and will
Who would buy it and take it to the top of the hill.
Pull it down, said his friends, but Partridge said no—
Pull it up, that we will—that's the way it will go.

New Year's Day dawned bright and fair
And twenty-two horses were gathered there.
Five yoke of oxen were in the throng.

Lothrop, Jennings and Bishop sent theirs along.
 Hodgkin from River Road noble and grand
 Hove into sight with four in hand.
 The Additon boys sent over a pair,
 Win Caswell, Frank Austin, Kim Becker were there,
 Herbert Bates, Moses Howe, Roswell Wing and young son,
 Charles Carpenter also was kept on the run.
 McDamus, Rupert Wing, Lindley Parker and others
 All came to the racket and helped out like brothers.
 With horses and oxen all hitched to the sled—
 At ten o'clock Beals shouted, "Boys, go ahead."

Two hours and one half by the timepiece they
 Had landed safe on the spot.
 Some thirty sat down to a dinner all hot
 The farmer's wife knows the way.
 The cattle and horses were not forgot—
 They had plenty of oats and hay.
 There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done;
 There are thousands to prophesy failure;
 There are thousands to point out to you, one by one,
 The dangers that await to assail you.
 But just buckle in with a bit of a grin
 Then take of your coat and go to it.
 Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
 That cannot be done-and you'll do it.

Ellen Partridge's unswerving dedication to rhyme makes this a poem—but the lessons within make it a paradoxical parable of life for turn-of-the-century Leeds. The individual faced an endless series of challenges to do "things that cannot be done," from tilling unwilling soil, to moving cumbersome barns uphill, to starting anew from the ashes of fire. As Ellen Partridge points out, taking on such challenges requires an independence of mind and spirit. "There are thousands to tell you it cannot not be done," she warns, but listen to yourself and "you'll do it." As the rest of the poem proves, however, "you'll do it" with the help of your neighbors. In life as in poetry, independence was the theme—and interdependence was the plot.



The names of Ellen Partridge's neighbors date her poem at the turn of the century, but their neighborly ways could have been found in any era of Leeds history from the time of settlement to the end of World War II. So long as the boundaries of their world remain fairly intact and impenetrable, townspeople had to rely on each other to survive, much less thrive. In the few decades since World War II, however,

the poem of Ellen Partridge has rapidly become a period piece. The century-old boundaries of life in Leeds have been erased, the neighborhood reshaped, and the role of neighbors in one another's lives rewritten—indeed, almost edited out.

Many of the changes which have gripped the town in recent decades had been coming for a long time—but not until the end of World War II did they arrive in full force to radically reshape the worlds of Leeds people. Cars first came to town in 1912; only in the post-war decades, however, was the Leeds continent, long divided, finally conquered—its unruly terrain tamed and its ruthless seasons of snow and mud neutralized by massive improvements in road conditions. Like so many black threads, the town's tarred roads have stitched its many isolated hamlets of life together into a single fabric.

Gone are the distinct territories of childhood. A child's world is framed, not by a window in the family farmhouse, but by a window in the family car: as parents have left the farm for the working worlds of nearby cities, so their young children now leave the local neighborhood daily to enter day care centers and nursery schools. Gone too, are the pedestrian parameters of the child's school district. Since 1953, Leeds students have been transported to the Central Elementary School on Route 106, where they are sorted into separate classroom worlds according to age and grade. Upon graduation from eighth grade, they move en masse to Leavitt High School across the river in Turner—a public high school cooperatively organized in 1966 by the three towns of Turner, Leeds and Greene. From first grade to finish, then, the cohabitants of one's school world do not come from one's own neighborhood, even one's own town. The brief rides between home and school on the schoolbus are the single, shaky ground for neighborhood interaction—a telling statement of neighborhood life in the age of automobility.

While the centralized schools teach children little about their own neighborhoods and neighbors, they provide appropriate preparation for the equally expanded horizons of adult life. The neighborhood names of West Leeds, North Leeds, Leeds Center, Quaker Ridge and Curtis Corner live on in the lexicon of Leeds people, but they signify little more than postal address—and even that significance has been challenged recently by a petition to unite the entire town under one mailing address: "Leeds, Maine." This petition is, in a sense, a logical last burial rite for neighborhood identity, since all the institutions which gave meaning to the neighborhood names have already died out. The post offices have merged into a single building at Leeds Center. Leeds does still possess five general stores—but all five are situated on major commuter routes: Twin Bridges on Route 219; Brenda's Variety, the Wheeler Store and, in summer, Riverbend Campground's supply store on Route 106; and, most peripherally, Red Roof Grocery on the no-town's-land of Route 202. Several of these stores occupy the same building as a general store of former days; but none of them occupy the same important place in neighborhood life. A few local residents may gather, mornings, at Smith's Market to solve the world's problems, but not everyone living nearby inevitably comes in once a week to exchange farm goods, pick up the mail and drop off the latest rumor. Instead, many Leeds residents drive

to the less expensive and more expansive shopping markets of area cities; there, encounters with a neighbor are infrequent and even vaguely discomfiting—for, in the purposefully impersonal environment of a shopping mall, mass-manufactured to suit any landscape from Lansing Michigan, to Lewiston, Maine, a familiar face looks oddly out of place, even strange. The urban belt surrounding Leeds has become the “downtown” this town never had, but it is a downtown which diffuses community life rather than strengthening and centering it. With the Greater Lewiston-Auburn area at their disposal, Leeds men and women need never meet their neighbors, much less love them.

Just as improvements in transportation have redefined the neighborhood of life, so improvements in telecommunications have redefined the neighborhood of knowledge. In January of 1960, the Leeds Telephone Association sold its properties to the Lewiston, Green and Monmouth Telephone Company. In October of the same year, the new owners replaced the aging crank phone system with a dial exchange. Both changes vastly improved the lines of communication between Leeds and the world beyond its borders. Townspeople can now carry on fairly clear conversations without translation by an operator—and they can place their calls any time of the day or night without getting a neighbor out of bed. While facilitating the flow of knowledge across Leeds’ borders, however, the same changes have dammed up the rivers of knowledge that once ran within Leeds. The town no longer has a single storehouse of information named “Central” to keep everyone up on the news. And, as residents gradually abandon party lines for private ones, they give up the other traditional technique for learning that news: listening in. The party lines still in operation have only two or three houses on an exchange: hence, those who are noisy when nosey stand a much greater chance of being identified by their irate neighbor.

As with talking machines, so with talking boxes: the television has widened our world of knowledge but has weakened knowledge of our own local world. The local clubhouses, entertainment halls, and evenings at the general store have been displaced by the livingroom world of television. One need only turn the knob to take in the sights and sounds of some distant—and often non-existent—place, from “Dallas” to New Delhi, “Petticoat Junction” to Portland. “I know more about what’s happening in Portland today than I did about Leeds in the ‘thirties,” muses Leeds Center farmer Russ Buckley. Russ probably knows less about his Leeds Center neighbors than ever before, however, for he can no longer go down to the general store or clubhouse to learn the local news. The television knob has taken the place of the neighbor’s doorknob, and T.V. stories have replaced the neighborhood stories swapped evenings at the general store. The death of Bill Burgess may have meant the death of his clubhouse—but the arrival of television about the same time obviated any resurrection.

So the neighborhood of knowledge has changed; like a pond overflowing its banks, it has become broader and shallower. At the same time, public services have moved out of the hands and homes of Leeds’ residents, taking with them another ground for communication. The selling of the Leeds Telephone Association in 1960

deprived its stockholders of both the burdens and blessings of a cooperative venture. Neighborhood control of the local schoolhouses had been lost by 1893, but the larger Leeds community retained relative autonomy in the administration of its elementary educational program until 1966, when the town joined Turner and Greene in organizing School District #52. Budgetary decisions determining the fate of the Leeds Elementary School now need approval not only from the community the school actually serves, but from the two other district towns as well—and a recent redistribution of school board votes per capita has given fast-growing Greene a greater say in those decisions than Leeds itself.

Likewise, the public sphere is no longer one's neighbor's house. The Leeds switchboard has left a local bedroom and moved to an invisible building in a distant city, to be staffed by strangers rather than neighbors. Postal and medical services have stayed in Leeds—but each has moved into its own public building, designed to separate the private lives of those who work there from the services they provide. The Leeds postmaster does not live upstairs from the post office: he lives in another town altogether, and regards his job as a temporary stop along the career path to bigger and better post offices. The imported doctors who staff the D.F.D. Russell Medical Center do not, like Russell himself, live upstairs from their examining room: they only work there. And, with few exceptions, they tend to be transient community figures, leaving Leeds after a few obligatory years of rural health care "experience." Unlike in days of old, however, the departure of public servants does not damn the public service itself—for we have finally created institutions which are larger than the individual, and have provided permanent foundations, physical and financial, on which to perpetuate them. In present-day Leeds, the public world need not be created anew by each generation; it need only be inhabited.

The establishment of a distinct and permanent public sphere has been facilitated by a greater range of materials for its making. In the years since World War II the pool of resources available to Leeds people has, like the pool of knowledge, overflowed the town borders. With the breakdown of transportation and communication barriers and the influx of local building funds and personnel programs, Leeds need no longer build its institutions out of the lives and homes of neighbors. Instead, it can call upon the professional services of architects, consultants, contractors, and trained personnel.

As a result a divorce has, by degree, taken place between the public world of Leeds and the private worlds of its residents—a divorce given architectural expression by the evolution of local school buildings. For lack of other resources, the first schools took place on the farms of the settlers; in winter a local parlor was used and, in summer, a corn house or barn floor. In time, each district designed and constructed its own school building—and, because the settlers took their materials from the land and their blueprints from their own experience, the buildings naturally mimicked their own farm buildings. Indeed, schoolhouses were so much like farmhouses and sheds that, when no longer used for public purposes, they were purchased by residents and easily adapted to private purposes. Two are now houses,

and three more serve as farm sheds. The central school building which replaced them in 1952, however, bears no resemblance to the private buildings of Leeds people, for it was designed by imported specialists rather than local citizens. A loan from the Maine Building Authority enabled the town to shop beyond its own borders: it purchased a design from an Auburn architectural firm and the construction work from an Auburn building company. The Leeds Central Elementary School, large, squat and square, with its wide windows, flat roof and paint coat of "institutional" green, could not easily be converted to private use. It is a purely public sphere, designed for the single function of classroom education—a far cry from the schoolhouses, as much house as school, which Leeds people once built themselves.

Given a broader pool of resources, Leeds has been able to provide a more durable—and sometimes more suitable—sphere for its public life. But the town has also learned to overlook and even distrust its native needs and resources. In the most recent case of school construction, the result was a building not only distinct from private life but even inappropriate to public life: a kind of Frankenstein at odds with its own environment. When, in the early 1970s, School Administrative District 52 decided to build a new Leavitt High School in Turner, it went straight to the national marketplace and purchased a design from a Florida architectural firm. In so doing, it went a little too far from its own environment. The building had been designed by southern minds for a southern climate and, when placed on the snowy landscape of Turner, Maine, it did something unexpected: its flat roof leaked like a sieve under a winter's weight of snow. Created not from local materials—the personal experience of Maine residents—but from foreign materials, it has, like the monster of Frankenstein, taken on a life of its own. Ten years later, SAD 52 chases after its monster, bucket in hand—and plans for a pitched roof in pocket.

Access to the world beyond Leeds' borders has, in the last three decades, put a new face on the town's public institutions. At the same time, these changes have altered the face of one private institution: the home. As public life moves onto its own ground, the home can become a more private world, uninvaded by neighbors and their needs. And, perhaps in part because the public world seems indifferent, even inhospitable, to our individual contributions, we fiercely guard the home as uniquely our own, discouraging outside intrusion by building walls where once there were none. In the opinion of ninety-one year old Herbie Libby, the presence of television is one such wall. "You don't go dropping in on people anymore," he explains sardonically, "for fear you might interrupt their T.V. program." In the mind of Glynis Pulsifer, the absence of neighbors is a more formidable obstacle than the presence of television: now that both men and women leave the home at all times of day and night, for work and for play, one cannot drop in unannounced for fear they will not be there. Others blame the telephone, arguing that since we can give warning, we feel we must: thus the spontaneity of neighborly visits vanishes, and the neighbor begins to feel like an intruder. But whatever the wall Leeds people face, the world it encloses—the neighbor's home—is no longer theirs for the entering. It has become private rather than common ground.

The right to intimacy has, in fact, been replaced in the hierarchy of local values by the right to privacy. The isolation of rural life, once a strong argument for intimacy, has become an end in itself. Real estate agencies advertise the "privacy" and isolation of Leeds' houses, proclaiming as an advantage what would, just fifty years ago, have been a drawback. With emergency ambulance services and a fleet of town fire engines at their beck and call, Leeds people no longer need watchful neighbors. Indeed, a vigilant eye in the window next door, once a kind of security against the whims of fire and fate, would be interpreted as intrusion today. Those who turn to their neighbors first in the event of an emergency risk a wasted moment in doing so—for, with over ninety percent of the town population working outside of Leeds, one cannot assume that one's neighbors will be there to help. But the lack of neighborly watchfulness, while desirable, can also be dangerous. When neighbors are strangers and their daily routine remains a mystery to others, a strange face or car at the house next door does not immediately signify suspicious activity: burglars, vandals, and arsonists can—and do—come and go without being comprehended or apprehended. As intimacy gives way to anonymity, crime spreads—and as crime spreads, new barriers to intimacy crop up, in the form of locks and bolts, shotguns and guard dogs. Nothing discourages the casual caller like the sight of a Doberman pinscher on the doorstep, or the knowledge that one's nearsighted neighbor keeps a gun pointed at the door after dark. Good fences may make good neighbors—but only so long as the fence is not trimmed with barbed wire, guarded by an attack dog, and hung with eloquent signs saying, "KEEP OUT."



For Leeds residents who have lived through the changes of the twentieth century, the decline of neighborly ways has moral implications. It seems as though human nature itself has changed for the worse. "People used to be friendly," laments an elderly woman of Curtis Corner. "No one comes near you now." Or, as a Quaker Ridge man puts it, simply and succinctly, "Everyone was neighbors, then."

The intimate world these two once knew and the strange new world they now inhabit are, in fact, worlds apart. Yet the difference is less one of moral than material climate. With a broader range of resources at their disposal, Leeds people have left the common ground of the neighborhood to regroup on other grounds. People are still friendly—but they are free to select their friends on the basis of more than just proximity. They still "turn to," but they turn to for those who share a church, a family or an profession rather than just a physical world. Human nature has not changed—but the highly material human condition has. Only by returning to the isolation of old could Leeds return to the neighborly ways of old: the enforced communion of lives on a common ground. ☘☘☘

PART TWO
THE WAYS OF THE PEOPLE

Let it be thy pleasure to do good to Zion,
to build anew the walls of Jerusalem.

Psalm 51

WORK

The spring of 1779 was a season for many things in embattled New England: a time to pull down the old, a time to build up the new, a time to die and, for Leeds, a time to be born. While the American war for independence moved south that spring, two brothers moved north, travelling by canoe from New Gloucester, Maine, to a pocket of land tucked between the shores of Dead River and Androscoggin Lake. Having arrived, Thomas and Roger Stinchfield immediately set to work. They broke the ground and seeded it; they built a block house and moved into it. And then they returned by canoe to their families in New Gloucester.

In early fall they came again, probably by canoe. They built more houses and hovels, harvested their crops, and buried potatoes in the ground for a future hunger. And then they left once more, to rejoin their families in New Gloucester.

In late winter they came again, this time in the company of four goats, travelling across the March crust and pulling sleds laden with camp stores and utensils behind them. They stayed through the spring, hunting deer and putting up venison, tapping maple trees and making maple sugar and molasses from the sap. And then they returned, once more, to their families in New Gloucester.

Finally, early in the summer of 1780, the Stinchfield brothers left New Gloucester for good. Accompanied by five other men, two women, and nine children, they journeyed by horseback, canoe and foot to their new homes in the wilderness. Thus Leeds, Maine, was built—not in one day, or even one season, but in four seasonal acts of turning and returning.

Yet the four acts of settlement—cultivation and carpentry, harvesting and husbandry—did not conclude with settlement itself. These same seasonal acts were repeated yearly by families in the century to come, and so the settlement story became a perennial script of sorts for work in Leeds. When, in 1901, the town celebrated its hundredth birthday, residents were still tearing down and building up, sowing and reaping, according to the seasons, and thereby directly providing the stuff of their own sustenance. The mode of work was still seasonal, and the meaning of work still embodied in the concept of settling or “subduing” the land. Standing at the podium of the Centennial Celebration that year, local poet Elsie Bryant sternly reminded her audience that their work in the century to come, like that in the century just past, was to “nearer keep the Lord’s command/ Thy work I give: subdue the land.”

Eighty years have passed since Elsie Bryant exhorted Leeds residents to subdue the land. In those eighty years, the land has been thoroughly subdued, and the modes and meanings of work virtually transformed in the process. The pursuit of a new frontier—technology—has taught Leeds residents the limitations of the old frontier, the land itself; and it has taught them to escape those limitations by seeking work elsewhere. Where once stood a small farming community now stretches a diffuse residential area, with twice as many inhabitants and one tenth as many farms. For the vast majority of these inhabitants, work is no longer seasonal, but year-round; it no longer demands a diversity of crafts, but instead requires a single specialized skill—for which one is remunerated, not with the fruits of one's labor, but with a paycheck. So residents wring their livings from the paycheck, not from the land—and turn to the seasons as persons of leisure, not as persons at labor. To every sport, there is a season, and a time for every hobby under heaven. But the time for work is always 9:00 a.m., and the place is no longer one's home or field but an office or factory in a nearby city.

Indeed, were one to seek a biblical basis for the nature of work in Leeds today, it would no longer be God's first command to humanity, "subdue the land." It would more likely be his second command, following the fall and expulsion from Eden: "You shall gain your bread by the sweat of your brow, until you return to the ground; for from it you were taken." The following chapter traces some of the changes in the modes and meanings of work in twentieth-century Leeds, and attempts to tell the story of the way in which one town has been "taken from the ground."



When in 1901 Elsie Bryant recited her Centennial Poem beneath a circus tent at Leeds Center, she addressed an audience well-acquainted with the art of "subduing land." Turn-of-the-century Leeds was a town of many farms and little else in the way of monetary enterprise—a town which persistently turned an agricultural face on an industrial world, much to the bewilderment of its observers. "Leeds continues what she has ever been," wrote one journalist in the year of the Centennial Celebration, "an agricultural town, but a town of many and prosperous homes." As the writer's choice of words implies, agriculture and prosperity were odd bedfellows in a New England town of the time. The same year, another writer for *The Lewiston Journal* noted with an undertone of wonder that "Leeds has not the large industries to bring in a revenue, such as other towns usually have, and the only income derived is secured from off the farms." As if to explain away this odd fact, the writer pointed out that the town, "situated as it is in the valley of the Androscoggin, possesses some of the best and most fertile farms in the state." True enough. What the writer failed to note was that these "best and most fertile farms" belonged to only a handful of Leeds families. The rest of the townspeople tended land lying between those alluvial fields, land better known for peat bogs and boulders than for fertility.

Leeds was, indeed, a town of many farms—but this testified less to the commercial quality of the land than to the noncommercial way of life. When asked about their occupation for a 1905 census, fifty-four percent of the town's working males identified themselves as farmers; twelve percent more paired farming with another agricultural sideline like wool-dealing or horse-breeding. The remaining thirty-four percent of the town's working males identified themselves as other than farmers, and yet many of these men were in fact living on farms and farming away most of their days; they probably just did not think of farming as a census-worthy "occupation" so much as a way of life. Ralph Buckley, for instance, had a general farm on Quaker Ridge, where, in the words of grandson Russ, he and his wife Rose "raised their living." Yet Ralph described himself to the census-taker as a can-maker—canmaking being a trade he had learned in Portland and now put to use in the Leeds corn shop during the fall canning season. Canmaking, which provided the Buckleys with their tax money, was a trade; but farming, which provided them with virtually everything else, was a way of life. Willard Howe, a part-time farmer on North Road, describes the difference between farming and other work thus. "You can't call farming a job," he says, "because you can't leave it." For the ancestors of Willard Howe, for Ralph and Rose Buckley, and for hundreds of other turn-of-the-century Leeds people, farming was more than just a job, a way to work: it was a way of life, a way to live. By producing their own food, shelter, clothing and heat, these farm families lived without the revenues of large industries; indeed, they lived without much revenue at all.*

Leeds farms came in all shapes and sizes, from the two-hundred acre operation of commercial farmer Howard Lincoln to the garden plot of peddler Izzie Lane. The props of farm production varied as much as the acreage. Oxen and workhorses were indispensable aides to any farmer with a field to plow. Sheep graced the pastures of a few, while beef critters grazed in the back fields of others. Pigs slopped around in some barn cellars. Most families kept a hen house full of laying hens, for eggs and poultry meat. But the common denominator of Leeds' farms was, without challenge, the family cow. The two-hundred head herd of today was unheard of in 1901, but, as Edgar Lane emphasizes, "Everybody had a cow."

Each farm had its own unique materials with which to work. Yet all farms conformed to a common pattern when it came to working those materials, a pattern arranged along the lines of season and sex. The line between men's work and women's work was clearly drawn and seldom overstepped. To an extent the distinction was spatial: women worked in the home and men outside of it (although that separation was not inviolable—the tending of hens, for instance, was tradition-

*The dubious status of farming as a trade had in fact gotten the town into legal difficulties in 1833. Following what was then a common procedure for care of the poor, Leeds had agreed to take a teenage pauper from the town of Freeport and place him in a trade apprenticeship; in return, Freeport had agreed to pay the boy's room and board. When Leeds hired him out to a farmer, however, Freeport refused to pay the stipend on the grounds that farming was not a trade. A litigious Leeds took Freeport all the way to the Maine Supreme Court, which ruled with the defendant that farming could not, in fact, be considered a trade. (Inh. of Leeds vs. Inh. of Freeport, 10 Maine 356)

ally women's work). The distinction was also in part physical: men did the "heavy" work and women the "light" work. Hence, when feeding the hens on the Millet family farm, Mr. Millet lugged in the grain and Mrs. Millet distributed it to the flock. And then the distinction was also temporal: men worked from sun to sun, but women's work was never done.

That last distinction has not only rhyme but reason. Unlike women, men worked in areas dependent upon the sun for light. When Oliver Otis Howard recalled his farmer father during his Centennial Celebration speech, he pictured him working in several different places—all of them outdoors:

He was at work in the garden with a hired man, or in some one of his cleared fields; or he had his horses one at a time scampering around in his dooryard; or he was building the stone wall or planting those trees that today have such magnitude and magnificence

Howard's image of his grandfather suggests the variety of the general farmer's workplaces. It also says something about the variety of the general farmer's workways. Like the first settlers of Leeds, turn-of-the-century farmers rotated their work according to the season. The long days of summer were taken up with planting, tending and then harvesting one's fields of hay and corn; the shorter days of winter, in turn, yielded harvests of fire and ice—firewood from the forests, iceblocks from the frozen waterways of the town. In the interstices of these broad seasonal duties, general farmers found time for hunting and sugaring, butchering and building.

The general farmer's world of work, while bracketed by the two twilights of each day, thus demanded many different skills. In order to tend a garden, field, stable, fence and orchard, he had to possess a sound understanding of agriculture, husbandry and carpentry. He was helped along his daily way by practical knowledge of a host of other crafts, among them blacksmithing, woodworking, mechanics, masonry, butchering, and lumbering. Lester Merrill has culled the following list of skills from the diary of his grandfather, John Y. Merrill, kept between 1855 and 1865:

fixed bobsled,	lathing,
hopped barrels,	smoothing,
split stone,	shingling,
jacked house,	moved houses and barns,
killed hog,	went blueberrying,
worked in woods getting out sleepers,	cranberrying,
in woods after bobsled runners,	raspberrying,
worked in sled shoeing it,	cradled rye and wheat,
cut timber,	mowed and hayed,
killed ox,	hewed timber,
plastering,	

made coffin,
dug grave,
fixed clock,
dug in well,
stoned well,
fitted curbstones,
split out stone posts,

flagged cellar bottoms,
killed and skinned old mare,
bottomed three chairs,
built bridge,
built houses . . .

Lester adds to the list with his own memories of Grandfather John from later years. He recalls that John kept a charcoal kiln behind the house, built a sawmill and made the mill pulleys himself out of wood, made his own horseshoes and then shod the horses, and just generally "turned iron into anything he needed."

John Y. Merrill was, in the words of his grandson, a jack of all trades—and a master of many as well. Another highly diversified farmer was Kilbreth, who farmed in West Leeds in the early twentieth century. A wheelwright and blacksmith, cooper and carpenter, mechanic and musician, Kilbreth made the can-do anything character of general farming into something of an art, mastering any and every challenge with his own hands. His son-in-law Bob Grant, who ran a commercial farm up the same road in the middle decades of this century, recalls his elder's self-sufficiency with a mixture of awe and annoyance. "He used to get mad at me whenever I went to buy a new piece of machinery," says Bob. "It didn't matter how much hay I had down, by God, he could fix that machine. But by the time he got it fixed, my hay'd be under snow." When, however, Bob's gunstock broke off and he could not find a gunsmith good enough to replace it, Kilbreth's self-sufficiency took on a new light. The old man simply plucked a stick of cherry wood from the wood pile and carved Bob a perfect gunstock, using only a jackknife and sliver of glass. Another impressive example of turn-of-the century skill sits atop Additon Hill: it is the Additon family farmhouse, a rambling yellow rose of a home. The original house was built by someone of great architectural imagination in the 1870s. When, in 1904, a barn fire consumed it, the Additons moved down the road into a relation's home, and their teen-aged boys took the year off from school. Together the Additon men and boys cut the wood from their own land, hauled it to local mills, split the granite for the foundations—and, within a year's time, had rebuilt and reinhabited an approximate replica of the original house.

While the Additon men were out chopping and hauling, splitting and building, from sun to sun, the Additon women were inside the house down the road, cooking and cleaning, sewing and serving—and all without benefit of electricity. Ocena Pratt Additon, who became the wife of Ernest Additon and mistress of the replicated house in 1912, recalls the tyrannies of turn-of-the-century domesticity with some amusement but little nostalgia. Each week started off, ominously enough, with the previous week's dirty laundry. The Additons had running water, a luxury at the time, but even so, washing was a full day's work. "You put your white clothes on the woodstove and boiled them," explains Ocena. "Took them out

with a stick and put them in a washtub, and scrubbing them; rinse them and wring them out to dry, summer and winter. A good nice day in winter, you'd take them in frozen stiff, spread them out on a rack to dry." If Monday was washday, Tuesday was, in the logical order of laundering, ironing day—and everything had to be ironed, for these were the days before permanent press. One heated the flatiron on the woodstove. "In summer we didn't want much fire," points out Ocena, "and 't was a good hot day, you had to build up the fire, 'cause you had to iron." A solution (of sorts) was to move the ironing board to the coolest part of the house, far from the stove, then go back to the stove, grab that iron—and God help anyone you ran into on the way. " 'Course the iron was always cold when you got there anyway," says Ocena. Wednesday, she was once again at the woodstove, using it this time to cook the food for the coming days. Like other Leeds women, Ocena made everything for the Additon table from cottage cheese to applesauce, biscuits to butter—and churning butter for a family of Additonian proportions was a forenoon's work in itself. Thursday was for "general work"—that is, everything that had been left undone on other days. Friday, one cleaned the house from top to bottom; and Saturday was another cooking day. " 'Course, every day was a lot of cleaning," says Ocena. "Every day, you had to empty your pots, clean your lamp chimneys, trim your wicks, make your beds . . ." And once the house work was done, there remained the hen house work to do: the flock to be fed and watered, eggs to be gathered.

But these were only the daily and weekly chores of the turn-of-the-century farm woman of Leeds. She also had to contend with the special assignments of each season. Spring and fall, mothers travelled to the city to purchase cloth for the wardrobes of summer and winter. Wardrobes were smaller then: children wore the same set of clothes for a week or so, the girls carefully covering their few dresses with aprons. Many clothes were made over for the next child in line—and the women made themselves dresses from grain sacks. Thus there were fewer clothes to create, but rather more clothes to recreate, and each item had to be sewn by hand or on a treadle sewing machine—a seasonal task which kept mothers of four like Ocena up and sewing until after midnight. With late summer came canning time, and women all over town spent several weeks giving quarts of vegetables and fruit hot water baths on stoked-up wood stoves. Once the garden had been packed off to the cellar for the coming winter, women turned their attention to the task of putting up meat. The Additon men slaughtered two pigs every fall; the women then transformed every bit of each pig, with the exception of the bones, into something edible. "The fresh meat you put in a boiler and buried in a snowbank," remembers Ocena. "The meat from the head was chopped and cooked and pressed into hogshead cheese. And the intestines you used to pack your sausage in. Even the hocks were pickled and put up." Grease from the pigs provided shortening for the coming year, and then Ocena mixed a little of the lard with ammonia and lye to make a hard soap for washing.

From the laundry soap to the laundering labor, the farm woman provided her household with a vast range of goods and services. She was an essential half of the

general farm's self-sufficient whole. The wealthier farmers of Leeds tended toward bachelorhood—but then, they could afford it. They had cash to buy the goods a wife might make and to hire a housekeeper for the services a wife might provide. Indeed, the story of one Leeds farmer suggests that housekeepers and wives were occasionally viewed as interchangeable. As the story goes, the farmer woke up one morning to find his housekeeper had gone off and gotten married. The farmer decided it was about time for him to do the same, so into his wagon he climbed and into the neighborhood he rode, to see who was available. He stopped at the first house along the way; alas, the lady was not in. He stopped at the second house along the way; this lady was in and willing, so they climbed into his wagon together and went off to be married. Perhaps they lived happily ever after, but hearsay has it that the next Sunday at church, the newlywed farmer ran into the first lady down the road—and fixing her with a wistful eye, said, "I sure wish you'd been home the other day." Another wealthy farmer was in less of a hurry. Ralph Lothrop courted Gertrude Jennings until both were in their late fifties. Amused neighbors kept track of the courtship by watching Ralph's lantern bobbing along in the dark up Church Hill Road every evening. But Ralph saw no need to rush. He had a housekeeper and an arrangement for his nightly meal at the table of a very good cook: his neighbor Bertha Waite.

For men and women of less means than Ralph Lothrop and Gertrude Jennings, however, marriage had pressing economic advantages. It united them not only in holy matrimony but also in homey self-sufficiency. Men provided the raw materials of that self-sufficiency, the animals and vegetables, the wood and the bare structures of shelter. Women transformed these basics into food, clothing, and the comforts of home. Together, they could make their way in a world of few cash revenues. Apart, they were hard-pressed to do so—no doubt one factor in the early and stoic marriages of the era.

Marriage was not the only institution which reflected the economic facts of life in turn-of-the-century Leeds. Both the tax structure and the commercial sector developed in a manner peculiarly suited to a town in which home-grown goods and labor were a readier form of currency than hard cash. One could not pay one's taxes with canned vegetables; but one could work those taxes off. In fact, the old system of tax collection encouraged payment in labor rather than cash. This system was usually referred to quite curtly in town records as "the old way;" but the town report of 1902 favors us with an elucidation. "It was voted to repair the roads in the old way," notes the report, "that the selectmen be instructed to apportion three-fourths of the sum raised for summer work among the resident taxpayers of the town, in proportion to their valuation; that each taxpayer be given an opportunity to work for his apportionment." That opportunity took the form of a personal visit from the town surveyor, who presented the person with an ultimatum: your money or your labor. The lengthy list of names annually printed under the title "Labor Presented to the Town" indicates that most Leeds men opted to work instead of pay. In the case of day laborers, the rate of compensation made it well worth their while to do so. In the early 1900s, an hour's work in a wealthy farmer's

corn field netted one thin dime; the town, on the other hand, paid fifteen cents an hour for "an able-bodied man" and another fifteen for his yoke of oxen or team of horses. The work was not always easy or pleasant: road crews destroyed obstructing boulders by attacking them with sledge hammers and spent days shovelling gravel by hand under the grueling summer sun. But they only did it once a year, and besides, crews could look forward to cooling their throats and tempers alike with a jug of hard cider kept handy by sympathetic farmers.

Like the tax system, the local stores of Leeds had developed along lines appropriate to the cash-scarce lifestyle of a small-farm world. As Stinchfield noted in his history of Leeds, the first stores in town were, quite literally, the stores of the settlers. "Some of the early, wealthier settlers kept large stocks of necessities for their own use," he writes, "and frequently accommodated their neighbors by sale or barter." Those settlers and their neighbors required very few goods from the outside world: they spun their own wool, wove their own cloth, grew their own grain, ground their own flour and feed. But the number of commercial products to be acquired by the general farmer grew with the years of the nineteenth century. Manufacturing techniques put cheap cloth on the market; western farmers put cheap grain on the market; agricultural specialists argued the merits of commercial feeds. By 1901, eight merchants had set themselves up along the roadsides of Leeds to hawk commercial groceries, cloth, grain and feed, which they bartered for the farmer's hay and the homemaker's butter. The merchant could then sell these farm products down the rails to the cities of New England, and the farm family could get its commercial goods without spending cash. Russ Buckley recalls one particularly devoted barterer of Leeds, a '49er from Quaker Ridge named Gilmore. According to Gilmore, most men thought it better to buy a ton of hay than to sell a ton. Gilmore, on the other hand, preferred selling his own to buying from others. "He'd take anything he raised down to the store," recalls Russ, "and he'd always come back with a few pennies, instead of leaving the storekeeper with a few."

If Kilbreth was the consummate artist of general farm life, then Gilmore was its consummate economist. His simple statement that he would rather sell than buy a ton captures, in kernel, the economic theory underlying general farm production, and his triumph over the storekeeper marks the end point of that theory: independence of others by virtue of one's own varied production. By possessing a general knowledge of the materials of their life, by practicing a broad range of skills, and by producing a wide variety of goods on a small scale, the general farm family could sit firmly on their own foundations. It was this quality of independence in the life of Leeds people which Oliver Otis Howard exalted above all others in his Centennial Celebration speech. Howard, who had long since left Leeds and the general-farm life of his grandfather, spoke for emigrants like himself when he said, "We are learning that the variety of production on a New England farm, where there are well-stocked barns and cellars not to be despised, is a source of comfort and even of luxury, that city salaries seldom furnish."

As Howard wistfully acknowledged, the barn and cellar, not the bank, were

the places where the value of general-farm life could rightly be reckoned. Indeed, were we to find a door to Leeds' past way of life, it might well be a cellar door, opening onto a world of dank smells and dark rooms, where the fruits of diversity are stored.



Oliver Otis was, in 1901, Leeds' favorite son, the cream of its filial crop and the centerpiece of its Centennial Celebration. And yet he addressed the celebrators as an outsider; he gave Leeds a vision of itself from the perspective of a salaried city person. Another Howard, a cousin of Oliver Otis, also addressed the gathered crowd that August day. Seth Howard had never left Leeds, although he had "peopled much of Iowa." He had lived his seventy-odd years first on Fish Street and then on the corner of Church Hill and North Road. He had worked as a general farmer and a state legislator. And his vision for the future was not one of well-filled cellars; it was one of well-filled patent offices. "The chief of the patent office," Seth Howard reported excitedly,

says that of the 600,000 patents issued in the last century, 150,000 were issued in the first seventy-five years and 450,000 in the last twenty-five years, and he predicted that in the next twenty-five aerial navigation will be accomplished, wireless telegraphy will be perfected; sight will be so extended that a man telephoning to his friend in St. Louis will see him face to face; that chemistry will be so advanced that gold will be separated thereby without the wasteful and expensive machinery now in use; that heating and cooking will be done by electricity.

One can fairly hear Seth Howard's voice accelerating as he speaks—quicken, like the gears of technology themselves, by the prospect of ever greater productivity in American industry, ever greater innovations in American life.

Both Oliver Otis Howard and Seth Howard presented their view of life in Leeds to the Centennial Celebration. Yet the two had such very different visions. Oliver the statesman praised the independence of the general farmer. Seth the general farmer lifted high the promise of technological improvement. Oliver painted a portrait of the past; Seth envisioned a future. But both visions, combined, comprised the present. As Oliver Otis Howard suggested, the economic facts of life in Leeds lay in the barn and cellar, not in a patent office far away. But, as Seth Howard's words revealed, the collective hopes of the townspeople had been caught up in the scientific-technological revolution then sweeping America, and Leeds people were expecting to ride its wave.

The industrial revolution of the earlier nineteenth century and the scientific-technological revolution at that century's end had flooded America with labor-saving devices. Seth Howard reeled off a few for the benefit of the Centennial Celebration crowd:

Those of my age have witnessed wonderful achievements in art, science and invention—the change from small vessels to steamboat and steamship, from stage coach to parlor and trolley cars; from goose quill to typewriter; from brick oven and fireplace to stove and furnace; from tallow candle to gas and electricity; from spinning wheel to loom and factory; from hand rake, sickle and scythe to horse rake, mower and reaper and harvester; from flail to threshing machine; and advent of telephone, telegraph, and photograph

Many of these wonderful inventions had, in 1901, long since made their way into the homes and fields of Leeds—stoves, manufactured cloth, telegraphs, and horse rakes among them. A few, like the telephone, were just making their appearance. Others, like electricity, had yet to come to town. And some, like the trolley car, never would. But the over-all mood was one of anticipation, and the attitude one of acquisitiveness. “People were looking forward to something better,” recalls Olena Additon. “When these things came on the market you got them; that was the idea.”

The idea was an expensive one. Leeds people had to find cash for their threshing machines, their carbide gas, their telephone bills. But the scientific-technological revolution provided new cash revenues as well as new cash demands. It introduced the food canning process and the steam engine. Neither of these new technologies weakened the agricultural character of Leeds; indeed, they strengthened it, by expanding the market for farm products. And yet they also gave Leeds its first faintly industrial features, in the form of the H. F. Webb corn shop and Swain’s dowel and box board factory.

Little is known about Leeds’ first corn shop, other than that it stood in front of the blacksmith shop at Leeds Center and burned in April of 1887. Within a year of that fire, a man named H. F. Webb came from outside Leeds and built a larger factory on the same spot. The Webb corn shop purchased sweet corn from local farmers, canned it and sold it under a variety of brand names. Some of the cans went to market under Webb’s own name; the rest went to new grocery chains like First National and A & P, which slapped on their own labels and stocked store shelves from the Atlantic to the Pacific with Leeds-grown “Maine Quality Sweet Corn.” One year, the high-priced Del Monte company even came to Webb’s for its corn, after its regular supplier had suffered a poor growing season. In 1927, Webb sold his Leeds corn shop to the Portland Packing Company, which from then on sold Leeds corn under the brand name “Honeydrop.” In an effort to expand, the owners of Portland Packing also gave carrot-canning a try in Leeds in 1934, with painfully unprofitable results: the women hired to cut and dice got carrot poisoning on their hands. After that, Portland Packing confined itself to canning corn at the Leeds factory until, in 1952, it closed the corn shop doors for good.

For four weeks of every year, from 1887 until 1952, the Leeds corn shop hired about seventy-five men, women and children to work in its sheds and on its assem-

bly lines. Each farmer hauled in his own load of corn and dumped it into the weighing shed, where men would husk and weigh one bushel, then multiply that weight to figure the whole wagon load. The corn shop took advantage of competition between local farmers to get the lowest bid possible on corn prices, and it is said that a few farmers tried to improve their profits by stopping at the Grange Hall enroute to the corn shop and watering their load to increase the weight. Once weighed, the corn was dumped into the husking shed, where women and children sat atop heaps of ears and husked them into bushel baskets. For each basketful, the husker received a colored ticket. After her first basket, she was given a green ticket; after her second, a red ticket; after her third, a yellow ticket, and so on. Each new ticket was worth a nickel more. Edna Waite Whetzel, who husked as a child, recalls that few children got further than that first green ticket. The children were often just there during their lunch hour, having walked down from the Leeds Center Schoolhouse—and a bushel basket was a full hour's work. In the 1920s, the husking shed was phased out in favor of automatic husking machines inside the factory. Later, child labor laws exiled children from the factory grounds altogether. At least one young girl continued to work at the corn shop, though: her father had died, leaving her mother with eight children to support on a housecleaner's wages; the corn shop foreman, a family friend, helped out by hiring the girl illegally, sticking her out of sight in the attic to hand down cans to the assembly line below through a hole in the attic floor.

Once the corn had been husked, manually or mechanically, it went onto a inspection belt which passed before a group of women armed with knives, ready to pick any cornborer insect larvae out. All ears which passed muster were then fed by women into cutting machines; from there the corn issued forth into a sieve which caught out elusive bits of cob and silk. The cut and combed corn moved into a mixer, to be combined with sugar, salt and starch, and from there into a coal-fueled cooker, which eventually released it at 190 degrees into waiting cans. Men put the cans through a closing machine and, as a final touch, baptized them with cooling water.

In the factory, as on the farm, labor was thus divided into men's work and women's work. Women were given the lighter tasks, largely a matter of handling the corn and cans. Men did the heavier and hotter work, which meant handling the machines. Women were given lighter paychecks as well: a report by the Maine Bureau of Labor and Industrial Statistics for 1891 reveals that women workers at Webb's averaged seventy-five cents a day—about the same as boys. Wages for men ranged from a dollar to a dollar and fifty cents a day, while girls, the lowest on the totem pole by virtue of their age and sex, made about fifty-five cents.

Whether one was male or female, child or adult, the corn shop was no place to make one's fortune. But it did provide a little much-needed cash and industrial experience, in a town where both were hard to come by—and in a time when both were increasingly important. While most of the machine-handling went to the men, even the women's hand work on the assembly line was a new kind of work

experience. It required repetitive movements at a pace regulated by the machine, not the worker—an altogether different kind of work from the self-determined diversified tasks which filled a farmer's day. Clarabel Burnham worked for a while handing cans down through the attic floor to workers below; she remembers very well just how "you had to keep awful fast, because that thing downstairs was filling the cans anyway. You had to have a can down there when that thing came through, else they'd waste the corn." As Clarabel's choice of words suggests, Leeds people were unaccustomed to having a "thing" set their work pace for them.

But the corn shop mixed the familiar in with the unfamiliar, and the pleasurable in with the unpleasant. It couched industrial work in agricultural terms. Corn shop work was, after all, not year-round but seasonal; not routine but a novelty; and not determined by the ticking of a time clock so much as by the tides of the harvest season. Workers might not be called in for days on end—and then be asked to spend days and nights at their posts, canning a load of ripe and ready corn. Moreover, the corn shop season was a social season as well; it gathered people from all over Leeds together, in an era when such gatherings were few and far between. As Lester Merrill describes it, "We had a sort of reunion every fall. It was like Old Home Week." Lester began working at the corn shop in 1906, at the age of twelve, and he worked there every autumn for the next seventeen years. Even after he had moved to Boston in search of more stable employment, he found his way back to Leeds in the fall for the corn shop season. Indeed, some memories of the corn shop would indicate that its first and final cause was not canning corn and making money, but socializing and making friends. One story has it that the women workers spent their entire earnings each season on a dress to be worn the opening day of the next season. When repeated to two female veterans of corn shop days, however, this story provoked a great deal of scorn—and a generational dispute about proper dress. "You didn't wear dresses as a rule in the corn shop," flatly declared Phyllis Burnham Buzzell. "It's just too dirty a job." But her eighty-six year-old mother was inclined to disagree. "No slacks for me, thank you," responded Clarabel Burnham. "They weren't wearing dresses when I worked in the corn shop."

The Leeds corn shop may have been the town's first major industry; still, it is remembered for its social aspects as much as for its workways. The other major industry which came to turn-of-the-century Leeds, however, left a different sort of legacy. The industry was Swain's mill, and the legacy was Slab City. Until Roscoe Swain came along, Leeds mills were mostly family affairs, created by local farmers for use by family and neighbors. With the introduction of the steam engine in the late nineteenth century, a few of these family affairs expanded and began to manufacture lumber for extra-local markets. White's Mill near the Dead River Bridge on Route 106 sawed and manufactured lumber; Wade's Mill at Curtis Corner made packing cases; and Merrill's Mill on Allen Stream made shingles and fish boxes. Despite the increased productivity of the steam engine, however, these mills remained small-scale industries, hiring few non-family members, and sometimes hard pressed to find work for themselves. The Merrill Mill, like many others,

opened and closed with the market: in times of low demand, John Merrill simply shut his mill doors and turned full attention to his general farm or another of his many trades and skills.

This manner of on-again, off-again milling may have worked well enough for a jack-of-all-trades like John Merrill. But Roscoe Swain was a capitalist of a different kind. He was not a farmer first and a miller second; he was first and last a manufacturer, a man of massive mustaches and matching ambitions who began his life-long manufacturing career on the banks of Bog Brook in West Leeds. There, on the same site occupied by Leeds' first mill, he built a large steam-powered factory, which purchased local lumber and made of it everything from box boards to dowels to film spools for the budding company of Eastman Kodak. A large crew must have staffed the mill, for its reputation as a job source spread as far as the Canadian Provinces, and it quickly spawned a community of tar shacks along River Road in West Leeds. The community was dubbed "Slab City," in deference—or at least reference—to the fruits of its laborers. Swain and his family lived in a large white house set in the middle of Slab City.

In the teens, the introduction of portable mills and the great demand for war-time lumber combined to strip Leeds of its timberage, and business at the mill began to falter. Unlike other local millers, however, Swain did not simply close up shop and seek a living from farmwork. Instead he moved to Roxbury, Maine, and started another manufacturing concern, leaving the Leeds mill in the hands of his son. But business never recovered, and in 1916 the mill shut down altogether. Several years later, the manufacturer paid a last visit, of sorts, to the town of Leeds. He sent two men down to rip the walls off his boiler house and load its steam engines onto flat cars bound for Roxbury. The mill buildings gradually crumbled and disappeared, but Slab City lingered on for decades, an impoverished miniature milltown without a mill—the signature of a man who had tried, briefly, to make his manufacturing dreams come true in Leeds.

Swain's mill and Webb's corn shop were the most visible signs of commercialization in the agricultural fabric of Leeds. But a more profound, if less visible, change was taking place in the texture of the fabric itself. Both the corn shops and local sawmills encouraged Leeds farmers to specialize in cash crops, by opening up new markets for their produce. If a farmer had land, capital, and a mind to make money, he could plant twelve acres of sweet corn for the corn shop; he could cut and haul cordwood for the mill; or he could do both. In fact, corn and lumber were perfectly complementary enterprises, for corn growing occupied one's hands and horses in the warmer months, while lumbering took up the winter months. Sweet corn was also a compatible crop for the dairyman, since the corn shop reimbursed its growers with cobs as well as cash, and the cobs made excellent ensilage. Howard Lincoln, whose farm in West Leeds boasted a single ninety-acre field of the finest alluvian soil in town, coordinated his operations to take advantage of each of these markets. He cultivated about twelve acres of corn, which netted him as much as three thousand dollars annually at the corn shop; he hauled the cobs home and

fed them to his herd of fifty Holsteins, whose milk he then sold; and he put his horses to work in the winter hauling lumber from his woodlots to the local mills.

Expanding urban centers in New England also provided the farmer of means with lucrative markets. Maine sweet cream, butter and cheese were all in high demand in the northeastern cities of the late nineteenth century. The towns surrounding Leeds responded to this market by setting up cooperative creameries for local farmers. Wales, just to the south of Leeds, had one of the first such creameries in the state of Maine; Turner, to the west, had the most long-lived and lucrative creamery in the history of New England. Leeds itself never established a creamery. Its dairymen sold their milk across the river to Turner or up the rails to the Livermore Falls creamery; and when, at the turn of the century, Americans began to develop a taste for whole milk, these dairymen skipped the creameries altogether and loaded cans of milk right onto the train headed for Boston. But one group of farmers did form a Leeds Dairymen Association, which set up a cheese factory in a little white building at Leeds Center; members of the Association could then sell their milk to the factory at prices they set themselves.

Meanwhile, the urban populace of New England needed ice to keep its milk and cheese from perishing in the summer months—and one Leeds farmer was perfectly situated to take advantage of this particular market. Willard Lothrop had an inspiring view of icy Androscoggin Lake from his Leeds Center parlor window; he lived right by the Leeds Center Railroad Station; he owned a very wet meadow between the railroad tracks and the lake; and he had the capital and entrepreneurial vision to turn these odd circumstances into assets. He used his capital to hire day laborers, who cut the ice from Androscoggin Lake, stored it in sixteen by thirty-inch blocks in an ice shed behind the barn, covered the blocks with wet hay cut from the meadow, and then, come summer, loaded them onto refrigerated railroad cars bound for Boston and New York. Lothrop's entrepreneurial spirit was probably behind the cheese factory at Leeds Center, and he may even have been the person who invited H. F. Webb to Leeds. Unfortunately, the town history does not specify his achievements: it notes only that he "contributed much to the advancement of the town by securing the establishment of various industries therein."

Thus turn-of-the-century America offered Leeds a variety of new markets, and farmers like Howard Lincoln and Willard Lothrop had the means and the money-making minds to take advantage of them. They did not yet have machines to make it easier, however. Ice and lumber had to be harvested by hand, sweet corn had to be hoed and picked by hand, cows had to be milked by hand. The large farmers found the "hands" for their tasks in two ways. First, they hired one or two men by the month, to help with the basic chores of running a large farm. Some of these men were itinerants like Rufus Cotton, who roamed Maine, staying for a season at this farm or that farm, doing a few chores in return for room and board. According to Bob Grant, whose father ran the Sunnyside Farm on Fish Street, Rufus would come around in the fall of the year, with no horse, no coat, nothing except a bag on his shoulder. The bag was full of catnip which Rufus cut from roadsides as he

travelled about and then sold to people along his route. The Grants would put him up for a while in exchange for chores, but, as Bob recalls, it did not always work out for either party. "We thought we had somebody who could start the chores early, get the cows in and tied up for milking—they'd go into their stalls anyway, if you let 'em," explains Bob. "But Rufus didn't know just where they stood. I get up there one morning, and I can see those cows running back and forth and Rufus sticking his head in the water trough till the bubbles come up, saying, 'Drown yourself, Rufus, you damned old fool, drown yourself.' And then he'd stick his head down and try to drown again." The Grant family also hired an occasional "city person," with equally unsatisfactory results. They like to tell how Lottie Grant once asked a hired boy from the city to carry out a pail of wash water and put it beneath a flowering bush—so the boy carried out the water and set it very carefully, pail and all, under the bush. Then there was the city fellow that Lottie's husband Arthur sent down to a corn field with a two-horse cultivator, only to find that he had cultivated up the corn instead of the earth between the rows.

Most of the hands hired by the month were neither itinerants nor urbanites, however: they were the sons of Leeds farmers. When a boy came of age, he was expected to pay for his own room and board at home. Many of the smaller farms in Leeds lacked work for their sons, though—so a young man who wanted to farm might hire himself out for a year or two to a larger farm, where he could earn his keep, put a little money aside, and serve an informal agricultural apprenticeship. Unlike their itinerant counterparts, these hired hands lived in the house with the farm family and, as Ocena Additon recalls, "you treated them just like family, did their washing, ironing, everything." Occasionally a worker paid cash for his room and board; in the fall, for instance, men travelled around threshing oats, and paid for their stay at each farm. Appropriately, the cash coming from this arrangement went to the woman who gave them the comforts of home and table. Ocena, for instance, paid for her first dining room table and chairs with money she earned from boarding threshers. (In an extension of the same economic philosophy, money earned from boarding teachers belonged to the woman of the house. The town record of 1891, for instance, reports that Mrs. Ada Gould received money for boarding teachers, while her husband Russell was paid for cutting schoolhouse firewood.)

This, then, was one kind of farm worker, known as the "hired hand"—hired for his hands by the month, paid mainly with room and board, and put to work at the daily chores of farm life. The other, more numerous kind of farm worker was the day laborer—hired for his labor by the day, paid with cash, and put to work at a single seasonal task. Whether that task was hoeing and picking in a corn field, or cutting and hauling in the woods, day labor uniformly brought in a dollar a day, according to the "Law of Lothrop." This law, which was articulated by Leeds Center farmer Ralph Lothrop but bears a certain resemblance to the internationally famous "Ricardo's Iron Law of Wages," states that "if you pay them more than a dollar a day, they won't come back." The logic was economically impeccable, if morally impugnable. By giving their laborers just enough to live on, the large

farmers kept them from saving up enough cash to become financially independent. A dependent laborer was a dependable laborer—and the farmer needed dependable laborers because he was in fact dependent upon them. When ice was melting, it had to be shipped; when corn was just so ripe, it had to be picked—and it took as many as thirty hands to harvest the field of a Lothrop or Lincoln. Thus the farmer had to have enough local economic leverage to round up a crew of pickers on a day's notice. The memoirs of Edwin Clifford, a hired man on the commercial farm of Peter Lane, give us a glimpse into the manner of hiring in turn-of-the-century Leeds. "It comes to my mind one fall," writes Clifford, "the 'Field Man' ordered our corn in the next day, and Father told me to take the team over to Wash Kemp's, who was a darkey some three miles away, and get him and his boys to help." Notably, Edwin did not go over to ask the Kemps; he was sent to get the Kemps. The mission proved memorable, not because the task at hand was unusually urgent—"we often had to round up a crew of pickers in a hurry," writes Edwin—but because the wagon hit a skunk. "We were immediately aware of the interview," drawls the memoirist, "but we had no arguments to offer." Apparently the Kemps had no arguments to offer, either; if so, their objections receive no mention in the memoir.

Indeed, it is hard to imagine what argument a day laborer might have offered, so effective was the Law of Lothrop. One could pick corn for Peter Lane; one could cut ice for Willard Lothrop; one could haul logs for Howard Lincoln; but whatever one did, it would still bring in a dollar a day. And, in an era of ever-increasing cash demands, the laborer needed that daily dollar. If he had a farm and family, he had cloth and grain to purchase, taxes and tuition and telephone bills to pay; and, if he was like Seth Howard, he had an eye on the costly fruits of material progress.

Of course, Leeds people came up with other ways to earn cash besides in the fields of the big farmers. The Kemp family picked corn for Peter Lane—but they also gave concerts in Grange halls across the state. Washington Kemp had been a slave down South until freed during the Civil War and taken into the service of General Oliver Otis Howard as a valet. When the war ended, the General went to Washington to manage the Freedman's Bureau, and Kemp came to Leeds to manage the General's farm. Both men's post-war activities proved politically problematic: while Howard was facing impeachment proceedings in Washington for his handling of the bureau, Kemp was struggling against the hostility of Howard's mother. Her hostility triumphed, and so the Kemp family bought their own small farm at Curtis Corner and eventually made a name and a living for themselves singing "Songs of the Sunny South" to Northern audiences.

Other, somewhat less glamorous sidelines for Leeds' day laborers included cobbling, butchering, and blacksmithing shops in local barns, plus a fair number of cider stills. Not that anyone ever sold hard cider. "You'd just put your dollar on the table, and they'd pick it up," explains Cad Morris. "But they never asked for it."

The women of Leeds' small farms also contributed to the family cash supply. Unmarried daughters might spend summers in coastal resorts as waitresses, or find a year-round job in a Lewiston-Auburn shoeshop. Many, like Winifred Pettingill Millet, taught in the local one-room schoolhouses before marrying. But once Winifred got married, says her daughter Myrtis Pillsbury, "she forgot about that, after a while." Instead, the married Winifred earned her money within the proper limits of her sphere, the home: she made cheese for local stores, sewed clothes for the neighbors, and raised laying hens for commercial purposes. Meanwhile, down at Curtis Corner, green-thumbed Sadie Libby grew gladiolas for sale. At Leeds Center, Bertha Waite ran a summer boarding house and cooked meals year-round for bachelor neighbor Ralph Lothrop. On Quaker Ridge, Gladys Buckley was knitting booties and sending them to Massachussetts. Bernice Gould Cushman Day delivered flowers to funerals, for a dollar a day. And a woman on Fish Street delivered babies, for a dollar a delivery.

The cash-earning methods of Leeds women and men were admirable in their ingenuity. As we admire them, however, a contradiction in the terms of life begins to appear. Seen through the words of Oliver Otis Howard, the workways of Kilbreth and the economy of Gilmore, Leeds emerges as a community of general farmers, independent of cash and wage work by virtue of their diverse skills. And then, seen through the words of Seth Howard, the tarshacks of Slab City, and the Law of Lothrop, a very different community emerges: a community enticed by new markets and new machines into commercial specialization, class division, and cash dependancy. Yet the two communities were one—a community formed according to traditional agricultural patterns, and reforming in response to the subtle changes of modern industrialization.

Such contradictions are a product of change: the past and the future momentarily co-exist in the quickly shifting present. The turn of the century was just such a moment for Leeds. As the nineteenth century turned into the twentieth, so, too, the modes and meanings of work for Leeds residents turned—away from the security of the well-stocked cellar, and toward the promises of the well-stocked patent office.



And yet, if the turn of the century was a moment in which Leeds pivoted toward material promise, the century into which it turned proved an era of stumbling and disappointments. Instead of being swept along on the tide of technological improvements, Leeds found itself swept aside and stranded, capable neither of producing for the new markets nor procuring the new machines. The teens and twenties have gone down in the annals of American history as a period of prosperity; in Leeds, Maine, however, it was more precisely an era of loss, as one seasonal industry after another was displaced by a new and transforming technology, or lost its market to a cheaper and more productive competitor somewhere else.

The long list of casualties began with the cheese factory at Leeds Center, that cooperative enterprise which had provided a modest market for the dairy farms of Leeds. As methods for shipping perishable goods improved, midwestern cheese proved a fierce competitor for the markets of northeastern cities, and prices for Maine cheese accordingly fell. Members of the Leeds Dairymen Association attempted for a time to recoup their losses by watering down their milk—with the unfortunate outcome that the milk no longer contained enough grease to oil the cheese being made from it. The association finally gave up its fight around 1912, and with the cheese factory went one source of revenue for local farmers. Another loss, even more deeply felt, was that of the lumber industry. The introduction of portable mills, coupled with a demand for wood of any age and quality during World War One, encouraged a sudden and complete decimation of Leeds' timber resources. The invention of cardboard also reduced the market for the town's primary wood product, box boards. By 1916 Roscoe Swain had shut off his engines and moved to Roxbury, while part-time millers like the Merrill family had simply left off milling and returned to farming full-time.

The advent of the automobile, meanwhile, was dealing a blow to two other cash resources in Leeds: the hay market and the tourist industry. As cars replaced horses and trucks took over for wagons, gasoline replaced hay as a form of fuel. In losing its hay market, Leeds lost a traditional form of commerce for bartering in local stores—and the economic philosophy of Gilmore, that "it's better to sell a ton of hay than to buy a ton," lost its practicability. Cars also dealt a death blow to the local tourist industry—or, rather, to the town's dream that someday there might be a local tourist industry. Leeds people had long been certain that the fine quality of their landscape and lakewater would eventually prove a lucrative asset. "It is only a matter of little time," predicted J. C. Stinchfield in 1901, "when Leeds, with its delightful scenery—pure air and water—pleasant drives and lake advantages, will become a favorite summer resort." And he noted approvingly the "rapid increase in the number of summer guests at the public and private residences in the vicinity." Other observers were also aware of budding tourism, but they were perhaps less enthusiastic about its prospective blooms. O. O. Howard described in tight-lipped phrases "the sons and daughters of Columbia flocking to our rocky shores, and peopling our rugged islands, and trying to monopolize our life-giving springs." Also speaking at the Centennial Celebration, school superintendent Frank Herrick warmly welcomed the monetary investment of summer people, but worried about their moral influences, singling out for judgement "the fashion of city people's coming here on Saturday night and remaining over Sunday just for a good time and a chance to go fishing, making the streets have the appearance of a holiday rather than of Sunday" Such customs, concluded Herrick, "will menace the morals of the young men and women of this century." As it happened, Herrick need not have worried about tourist influences. The cottages cluttering the lakeshore of Leeds proved less popular as the lake became polluted with sulfide wastes, and the summer mecca of Leeds never materialized. If the morals of young people went astray anyway, the fault was to be found with fast cars and fast living, not with city people—who, when given the opportunity to drive fast cars them-

selves, drove them to less polluted places, off the railroad's beaten track.

Like the automobile, electricity arrived on the American landscape in the teens and twenties. And, like the automobile, it sapped Leeds of several sources of revenue—some minor, and some major. By 1929, seventy percent of the nation's industry operated on electric power, and all but the most rural outreaches of America had electrified homes. With electricity came the refrigerator; this great convenience did away with ice boxes, ice and Lothrop's ice industry. But Leeds lost more than just its ice industry to electricity: it lost its finest farmland as well. In 1925 Maine Central Power constructed the hydro-electric Gulf Island Dam on the Androscoggin River at Lewiston-Auburn. The dam increased the utility company's energy output by more than twenty-five percent—but it also backed up the river and flooded its banks upstream, turning the cornfields of West Leeds into flowage. Central Maine Power sent representatives armed with the right of eminent domain to Leeds to purchase the large farms of the Lincolns, Deanes, Thomases, and others. A few farmers held out, bargaining not for their land but for more money. Such resistance proved pointless, however, against the powers of eminent domain. The farmers sold their land for the price they were offered; Central Maine Power built its dam; the river flooded its banks; and the town of Leeds saw its most valuable agricultural asset swiftly swallowed up by the tides of technological progress.

What the town lost in land, it did not immediately receive back in the returns of technology. Central Maine Power did not bring its lines to Leeds until 1933, and then it went about the business of electrifying the town very slowly, at the rate of one neighborhood every few years. The first lines travelled along Route 106 to Curtis Corner, then over Bishop Hill and into Leeds Center. By the late thirties, lines had gone up along North Road; and finally, in the early forties, West Leeds received the electricity for which it had so dearly paid some twenty years before (the last part of the town to be electrified was the Knapp Road of North Leeds, which received its lines in 1947).

The village of West Leeds, with its shut-down mill, its impoverished tar shacks, and its fine fields now useless flowage, tells one side of the story of Leeds in the "prosperous" twenties. There is another, somewhat shorter side to the story, too—a side that tells of things not lost, and even of things gained. Despite the loss of its best corn fields, for instance, the Leeds corn industry kept going. It was protected in part by the national reputation of "Maine Quality Sweet Corn," and it was encouraged by the continued growth of the American urban populace, which greatly appreciated the cheap cost and convenience of canned goods. Howard Lincoln had sold his farmhouse and ninety-acre alluvial field to Central Maine Power; but the market was still there for his corn, so Lincoln simply farmed other fields in his holdings. Thus the corn shop continued to be a source of revenue for local farmers and laborers alike.

Two new sources of revenue also appeared in the twenties, both of them brought to town by the automobile. One was town road work, which, as we have

seen, had once been a way to earn tax money but little more. With the automobile, public demand for decent roads grew from a whisper to a roar. Leeds did not respond quickly: after all, these "pleasure vehicles" were of little concern to a farm town with other uses for its tax dollars. But an influx of state and federal aid for road work in the teens gave the town the necessary encouragement, and road work gradually expanded to a year-round source of revenue. If a man needed a little cash, he could pick it up working on the roads almost any time of the year—and most Leeds men saw fit to do that at least once in their lives.

Road work meant more than just cash in the pocket; it was a rite of passage into the ways of wage work. A farm boy was accustomed to working and resting according to his own choosing. But road work meant sustained physical labor under the eyes of a supervisor with little tolerance for individual inclinations. As Cad Morris puts it, the atmosphere was one of "fill your shovel or fill your coat." Former farmer Roswell Higgins recalls with some amusement his own initiation into the road crew of Leeds in the 1920's:

I had a hard time at first, 'cause I'd just been working for myself, and you don't hurry any—and then to start in there and working steady. Had to work in a gravel pit, shovelling by hand. Well, we hauled a yard and a half, and that's a lot of gravel. And it was rocky. You'd come out hot, hot as blazes. I was just as wet as if I'd jumped in a brook.

So I worked all that day, and I went home that night, and I was tired, and I was hungry, 'cause all I'd had was my dinner all day and didn't eat any breakfast. I sat down and I couldn't get up, and I says I'm gonna set here a few minutes, and I had an apple. I heard that apple when it struck my shoe step.

Higgins only stayed with it several weeks—just long enough, he says, so that "it got me on my feet, straightened me out, and gave me a little cash, when cash was getting to be thin."

Road work gave Leeds men lessons in being supervised; and, on occasion, it also gave lessons in resisting supervision. It introduced many a man to the means and ends of "organized labor"—if not to the institution of the union itself. Leeds has never been known as a hot-bed of union activity. It has never housed a unionized industry, and the fierce independence fostered by self-employment stands in the way even of sympathy for the activities of organized labor. But town road work challenged that very sense of independence in Leeds men—and the result, ironically, was an occasional collective action. Martin Alden remembers with satisfaction one such action. "One day there was a dozen of us working," he says, "and around 9:15, one of us at a time would take a lunch. That day Bud Rose [the road commissioner] comes along, says, 'Any man who can't get enough to eat for breakfast tomorrow, don't come to work.' So we got together, and the next day come nine o'clock we all dropped our shovels, walked off and ate." Of course, road work also taught a few the skills of supervision. Charlie Barker, who for the last two decades has managed his own construction company and crew, says he

learned how to supervise crews while working as highway commissioner for Leeds in 1959-60.

This kind of road work, which taught some how to manage and some how to resist management, is a far cry from the casual system of "Labour Presented to the Town" used in 1901. Road work had, in the space of the teens and twenties, become a regular, recognizable form of wage work. The other Leeds industry brought into being by the age of the automobile was Maine Sand and Gravel Company. In 1915 a Portland firm run by a man named C.B. Dalton purchased a piece of land in Leeds Plains from Cy and Gus Burnham. The Burnham-Wing pasture, as it was known, was in fact a gold mine of gravel: it sat at the end of the ancient esker, or gravel ridge, which runs through the center of Leeds. Dalton's new company, Maine Sand and Gravel, hired about twenty men to shovel the gravel by hand into wheelbarrows and load it onto waiting freight cars. This remarkable pit provided every grain of gravel and sand for the Gulf Island Dam; it filled many roadbeds for Maine Central Railroad; and it helped build the network of new roads which spread across Maine in the years after 1915. When, in the 1950's, the sands of the pit began to run out, its owners asked Androscoggin County to reroute Route 106 near the pit—and, much to the dismay of local residents, the county agreed. It rerouted the road and then sold the sandy land beneath the old roadbed to Maine Sand and Gravel, which scooped it up and carted it off: hence the precipitous sides and winding path which today define Route 106 as it approaches Curtis Corner from the south. Its effect on that one road aside, however, Maine Sand and Gravel had a positive effect on the local job market in the twenties. Its successor, Blue Rock Industries, is still hiring today.

Shovelling gravel, whether for Maine Sand and Gravel or for the town of Leeds, was the main job offering made to Leeds people by America's era of prosperity. Unfortunately, that offering did not offset the overall economic decline experienced by the town in the same period. In just two decades, Leeds people had witnessed the undignified death of their cooperative cheese factory, the demise of their ice industry, the decimation of local timberage, the closing of several mills, and the flooding of the town's finest farmland. They had seen farm prices and farm wages rise during World War I, only to watch both dive below pre-war levels in the crash of 1920. Leeds people still had their well-stocked cellars. But while they went on reaping the same old fruits of small-farm life, urban-industrial America was receiving higher wages and, with those wages, buying the glittering fruits of the new technologies: radios, Model T's, electric lights and a multitude of other conveniences. Walter Trider brought the first radio to Leeds in 1922—and yet, by 1930, the town had acquired only three more. The desire to possess radios and other new goods undoubtedly had not disappeared from the hearts of Leeds residents: but the purchasing power of the population had dried up along with so many of their cash resources.

The townspeople chafed at the material limitations of small-farm life, and many escaped those limitations by leaving Leeds altogether. In 1930, the town's population hit an all-time low of 729. Even those who wanted the small-farm way of life sometimes found themselves forced to depart it. Lester Merrill, of the mill-owning Merrill family, had watched his two older brothers move to Boston and get jobs on the elevated railroad there. But Lester liked his father's kind of work and planned to stick with it. He worked in the family mill, at the corn shop, and on the farm. By 1918, however, the mill had closed for lack of business, and Lester finally packed up and followed his brothers south, where he, too, found a job on the Boston streetcars as a motorman. "That was the biggest change," he remarks quietly, reflecting on his life. "Changed from being a farmer to working on streetcars." His terms, as much as his tone, betray his feelings about that change. "A farmer" is a noun, equal to the whole person: it is an identity. "Working on streetcars" is a verb, equal only to a person's wage-earning actions: it is not an identity but a job. Lester kept the job for twenty-seven years, but he never relinquished the identity. It was he who, while working in Boston, took off every fall to return to Leeds and work in the corn shop. For Leeds, as for Lester, the teens and twenties marked a time of strangely empty change. The old ways of work had lost their economic underpinnings, but new ways of work were yet to emerge. So Leeds, like Lester, clung to its traditional self-image; it continued to find its identity in the small-farm way of life.

The prosperous twenties had proven less than prosperous for Leeds; on the other hand, the Depression of the thirties also proved less disastrous for the town than for other regions of the country. The urban-industrial sector of America which had experienced the boom now bore the brunt of the bust. Few Leeds people had stocks to lose, bank savings to lose, jobs to lose; few even had mortgaged land to lose, since mortgages were rare in the area. People had farms to fall back on and they had the skills of home production sufficient to feed themselves. In 1934, the town still contained 122 farms; 101 of them wore that badge of self-sufficiency, the family cow. The memories of Myrtis Pillsbury are characteristic of many of Leeds' elderly today. "The Depression didn't affect my family too much," she says. "We had cows, we had hens, and we had a big garden, so we could raise our food. If we wanted meat, all we had to do was kill a beef critter." Like Myrtis, Ocena Addition responds to the word "Depression" with a shrug of the shoulders. "Didn't think anything about it," she says. "Everybody was doing the same thing."

Well, not everybody. For those who depended on wage work for their cash, the Depression more fully lived up to its name. Woodcutters took home seventy-five cents for a cord instead of a dollar and a half. Married teachers lost their jobs altogether, while single teachers had their wages slashed. In 1929, Keen's Corner schoolmistress Alice Waite had eighteen students and a weekly wage of as many dollars; by 1937, her classroom size had doubled and her weekly wage had declined to fourteen dollars and fifty cents. People could still feed themselves from their farms, if they lacked cash; but they could not so easily pay their property taxes. In 1927 the town report listed no liens and only eight instances of uncol-

lected taxes. By 1937, the town had thirty-six tax liens and twenty-six derelict taxpayers, whose names it published prominently on the front page of its annual report. Meanwhile, poor relief had more than quadrupled, from less than seven hundred dollars in 1930 to nearly three thousand dollars in 1937. The ways in which the town spent that three thousand dollars suggests that cash was very scarce, indeed, in some homes: the money went in bits and pieces to twenty-eight individuals and families, for immediate cash payment of medical bills, groceries and wood.

But the Depression's most noticeable effect on Leeds was one of immobilization. The economic collapse of the world beyond its borders brought the exodus of the town's young people to an abrupt halt. After eighty years of leaving home in search of life and a living wage, these sons and daughters had no choice but to stay put—and some who had left even returned. Lester Merrill and his brothers got laid off from streetcar work for a few years, so they came back to Leeds to see the Depression through, by doing what custom sawing they could. Others, like Martin Alden, came of age with the stock market crash and, as a result, never left the area at all. In 1930 the Turner-born Alden married a Leeds girl (Ruth Morris), moved to Leeds, and began looking for work. "If anybody got a month's work, you was lucky," he says. Martin's experience has not taught him patience with nostalgic views of the past. "To heck with the good old days," he declares. "I've been through 'em." In a sense, the effect of the Depression was to define sharply both the strengths and the weaknesses of Leeds' old economic system. It demonstrated the security of life on the land, for the landed; and it demonstrated the insecurity of that way of life, for the landless, the unemployed, the younger generation with nothing to start from and no place to go.

The emergence of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's New Deal reinforced these camps of opinion. FDR became, for the landless, a symbol of salvation from the old economic system—and he became, for the landed, a scapegoat for the collapse of that system. For laborers in perpetual search of a dollar, FDR's Works Project Administration provided an answer to their prayers. In 1936 alone, the Federal Government made available eight thousand dollars for road work in Leeds, to which the town added two thousand of its own. Together, the two sums put many Leeds men to work, with the result, exclaimed an exuberant town report in 1937, that "there has been ten miles of common road gravelled, three large culverts repaired and several miles graded and ditched." That same year, another WPA project put two thousand dollars (and the town two hundred) into a Blister Rust Control Program; during the next two summers, twelve men received a living wage in return for seeking out and destroying gooseberry and currant bushes which carried the highly destructive white pine blister. In 1939, the WPA came to town again: this time it appropriated State Aid road funds to tar the Bog Road from Curtis Corner to Monmouth. These projects did not provide year-round, permanent employment "with a future." But they did secure a decent wage for the present—nearly twice that being paid for farm labor or town road work at the time—and they made significant improvements in the town's transportation and timber

resources. And another New Deal child of 1936, the Social Security System, gave the future itself a much rosier aspect for many Leeds people. With its WPA projects and its revolutionary Social Security, the New Deal made ardent admirers of the struggling and landless in Leeds. Cad Morris, one of the gooseberry-getters, remembers with approval a sign in a Livermore Falls store window: "Hoover blew the whistle, Mellon rang the bell, Wall Street gave the signal, and the country went to hell. Hoorah for Roosevelt!"

Not everyone in Leeds felt that the country had derailed for the same reasons, however—and not everyone applauded its new engineer. Many in this heavily Republican town shared the sentiments of Tommy Jackson. Jackson was, in the words of a neighbor, "a died-in-the-wool Republican. He blamed everything on Franklin D. Roosevelt—crop failure—the price of milk—even the weather." Roosevelt is no longer being held responsible for the weather; but, in the minds of some, his New Deal can be blamed for fatally weakening the work ethic in American society. "Roosevelt changed things more than any president we ever had," says Myrtis Pillsbury, not intending it as a compliment. The end result of those changes has been, in her view, a world of unsupervised shovel-leaners. "Now nobody wants to work," she argues. "They want the government to help them."

The New Deal has thus been given two sharply opposed interpretations within the town of Leeds. Roosevelt the savior put people to work; Roosevelt the scoundrel taught people not to work. Behind both of these interpretations lies one fundamental change. With the establishment of the New Deal, the "town fathers"—that power block of wealthy farmers and selectmen who had controlled town spending and local wages for several decades—lost their hold on the local labor force. They could no longer enforce the Law of Lothrop without fear of competition from other cash sources. The influx of state funds and the establishment of a few (albeit a very few) non-farm job alternatives in the teens and twenties had begun to weaken the leverage of the large farmers; the coffee-break action of road workers in 1930 was, perhaps, a first sign of resistance to the iron hand of local authority. But the New Deal of the next decade rapidly accelerated the process by pouring in funds for road work and poor relief. In 1940, road workers struck again, this time for higher wages—and this time the strike quickly and clearly took the shape of a battle between the power block and the local labor force. Cad Morris, one of the strikers, tells us the tale:

We were building the road from where the church garden is now up through Mason Flat. It was a state job, but George Morris [the town's road commissioner] was there, learning to build roads. Well the state foreman and the shovel operator were from Litchfield, and they got held up. So George says, "Well, you can work for the town." But the town paid less—it was twenty-five cents for a laborer, I think, and eighty for a truck driver.

So the truck drivers got to talking, while waiting for us to shovel, and they

said, "We ought to get a dollar an hour, and the laborers should get thirty cents." So we decided we weren't going to work for the town. George Morris comes along, and we say, "We won't work for twenty-five cents an hour," and George says, "Don't blame you a bit."

So we went up to Lane's store, and it was quite a little session in there. One of the town fathers comes in and he said to one of the truck drivers, "If you can't get a whole biscuit, you ought to take a half a one." And the truck driver says, "I don't mind half a biscuit but I hate like hell to settle for quarter of one."

The strikers did not get their raise; nor did they get any work on town roads for a while afterward. But the moment in the store marked an important shift in ways of thinking about local work and wages. The "town father" in the store had reiterated the Law of Lothrop: you take what you get. But the truck driver had responded with a new law for Leeds, the law of the laborer: I will get what I deserve. A popular rhyme of the time put this new law more plaintively:

You have your money and I have mine.
If you get yours, it'll sure be fine.
But if you get yours, and get mine, too,
What in the hell am I gonna do?

State and federal funds had established an alternative to local farm labor, and given their workers a bigger bite of the biscuit to boot. And once the laborers of Leeds began to believe in their right to that bite, the Law of Lothrop could no longer function effectively. A complete collapse of the old "understanding" between employers and workers seemed imminent.

Within a year of the road workers' strike, however, the world was once again at war—and the rich dividends of a war-time economy made any quibbling over the division of biscuits unnecessary. The markets and prices for farm products shot up. Corn shop crews went to work over-time canning corn for shipments overseas and then procoating the cans to prevent an airborne enemy from detecting a glint of tin on the ground below and bombing it to bits. Corn growers expanded their acreage to accommodate a larger market—only to find that there were few laborers available to harvest it all. Wages for farm workers had risen to three dollars a day, according to farmer Russ Buckley. But sixty-two young men and women had left Leeds to serve in the war, and jobs had opened up for the older men at Bath Iron Works, with very attractive paychecks and pensions attached. With 125 acres of sweet corn hanging ripe on the stalk, the Buckleys found it necessary to advertise in the Lewiston Daily Sun for pickers—and when that appeal failed, they sent a truck up to Livermore Falls and brought it back loaded with women and children. Leeds' own women and children were being kept busy on their own farms, doing the jobs that their sons and fathers had left.

The wartime economy gave Leeds an odd mixture of prosperity and paralysis. Residents finally had the monetary means to attain the goods of modern progress—but there were few goods available for the purchasing. The country had turned its industrial attention to making the machines of war, which meant that new farm machinery was impossible to find. As Charlie Barker recalls, “If you wanted another tractor in the forties, you bought a used one that was made in the thirties, and paid more than they had ever sold for.” One Leeds family turned the high cost of farm machinery to their advantage: the Additons, long-time potato growers, sold their equipment to Aroostock County growers and took up commercial dairying instead. In making that move from the seasonal cash crop of potatoes to the continuous income of large-herd dairy farming, the Additons anticipated the future direction of local agriculture. For the rest of Leeds, however, the forties encouraged continuity rather than change—or, at most, only temporary departures from the established patterns of work. Corn, not potatoes, was the dominant cash crop on Leeds’ commercial farms, and the bustling wartime business of the corn shop encouraged corn-growers to keep things that way a little longer. Meanwhile, war-time industry gave Leeds laborers the chance to make money in temporary jobs, but not the chance to spend it on employment-enhancing goods like cars.

Without new tractors and without new cars, farmers and laborers alike kept moving in the same old directions for the present, and put aside their war-time profits for new directions in the future. Seeds of massive change had been sown in Leeds during the teens, the twenties, and the thirties. But not until war ended and the floodgates of technology flew open, would these seeds be watered and brought to fruition.



When, in August of 1945, the Second World War ended in United States victory over Japan, the Quaker Ridge schoolhouse bell rang all day long in celebration. That ringing ushered in a period of radical rearrangement for the town of Leeds. Indeed, had it tolled for every major change which took place in the next few decades, the schoolhouse bell would have been busily ringing all the time. It would have rung in 1952, for the establishment of a year-round Leeds Community church. It would have rung in 1953, for the opening of the Leeds Central Elementary School. It would have rung in 1954, for the institution of a secret ballot at town meetings, which formally ended the reign of the town fathers over the political affairs of the town. It would have rung in 1966, for the creation of School District 52 and the introduction of tuition-free high school education. And it would have rung loudly and long, time and again, for an endless chain of economic events, beginning with the collapse of the corn shop in 1952 and ending with the collapse of the broiler industry in 1981. All its tollings told, that bell would have sounded the death of Leeds as an agricultural community and its rebirth as a residential community.

The closing of the corn shop was perhaps the quietest of these events—but

one of the most repercussive as well. Agricultural mechanization gave the great unbroken fields of the West a sharp competitive edge over the fragmented terrain of the Northeast, an edge which finally cut Maine out of the corn canning industry. The corn shop had been the very warp of Leeds' agricultural fabric in the twentieth century; when, in 1952, that warp went, the fabric fell to pieces, and Leeds farmers were forced to abandon their previous patterns of production. Those who stayed in farming left behind seasonal cash crops and horsepower farming and shifted to the year-round increasingly mechanized industries of dairying and poultry. The mechanization of agriculture in Leeds was thus the effect, as well as the cause, of the corn shop collapse.

A few farm families, like the Additons, had not waited; but the town's farmers were by and large resistant to changing their work ways. The low profile of Leeds farmers in the Maine scientific farming movement of the previous century is one indication of this resistance; the low profile of technology on Leeds farms before 1950 is another. Maine agricultural historian Clarence Day notes that, by 1940, a yoke of oxen was hard to find—but he obviously had not looked in Leeds. That same year, the town report included not one but nine yoke of oxen in its inventory of livestock. Leeds farmers also took their time trading in horses for tractors: in 1955, horses still outnumbered tractors in the town report. The reasons for this reticence, as we have seen, included a lack of capital for mechanization and a lack of machines when capital was available. But a conservative sentiment entered in as well. The Buckley farm, one of Leeds' largest, was still planting with horses in the late fifties—and Russ Buckley declares that he would do so today, if it were economically feasible. "I tell you, you had no noise," he says, "and you were on the back end, where you could see that seed drop." But for Russ, as for many other Leeds farmers, the closing of the corn shop meant that horses had to go. "We had to increase the dairy business considerable to survive," he explains. And expansion required mechanization, sooner or later.

The collapse of the corn shop meant expansion for large farmers like the Buckleys, but it meant certain death for the smaller farmers of Leeds, who had neither land nor capital with which to expand. In Leeds, as in the rest of Maine, the fifties and early sixties witnessed the rapid demise of small-scale and general farming. Between 1954 and 1964, seventy percent of Maine's commercial farms with yearly sales under five thousand dollars disappeared. The Howe dairy farm on North Road was one that went under during that time—but not without an expensive struggle first to stay afloat. When, over fifty years ago, young Willard Howe had started farming at his father's side, he had learned to hand-milk the family's herd of twenty and keep the milk cool in a thick-walled ice tank. In the forties electricity came to the Howe farm on North Road and, with it, milking machines and an electric milk cooler, as well as a new milk house in which to store the cooler. In the fifties, the state began requiring bulk tanks for quality control on all Maine dairy farms—and the Howes had to build another, bigger milk house to store that in. The loss of cash revenues with the close of the corn shop made such improvements even harder to bear—and finally, in the sixties, the Howes' struggle to

survive in the dairying business came to an end. "Everything got speeded up, speeded up and then just wooshed right by us," says Willard, "and we had to sit down, let it go." But Willard liked the farming way of life too much to let it go altogether. While entering into an apprenticeship in carpentry, for cash, he also took on a herd of Hereford cattle. The purchase was less economically than emotionally motivated. "We don't make money on it; last year we even lost money," admits Willard, "but I just wanted the animals, wanted them as pets." The Howe dairy farm may have been a casualty in the local move to agricultural mechanization, but Willard's own way of life was not. Today he lives much as he did before he went under; he tends his herd, and, according to the seasons, does a variety of other tasks—handy work on a nearby apple farm, or haying his fields, or cutting his wood.

For the dairy men who kept pace with production costs, however, the farmer's way of life has changed a great deal. Herds of twenty cattle gradually expanded to herds of two hundred, as milking "systems" and milking "parlors" came along to spare the farmer's hands and speed up the milking process. New methods of breeding and feeding have, in turn, doubled and even tripled the milk production of each cow. When Russ Buckley began dairying in 1943, the national annual average of milk per cow was 5,150 pounds. Since then it has doubled to 11,000 pounds—and members of the Buckley herd average 14,000. "My father and the rank-and-file farmers of Leeds, all they cared about was to get a cow to have a calf," explains Russ. "When artificial insemination came along, then they had so much better bulls. That's the difference—that and the Extension service and the grain companies."

Leeds dairymen have also seen changes in the quality of their product, thanks to the device that put many small farmers out of business—the bulk tank. "When milk was cooled in ice," says Russ, "it was never cooled properly. Then, in the summertime, farmers used to take their milk to the railroad station and set it on the platform in one-hundred degree weather." The electric cooler did not improve matters much; in summer it would run for twenty-four hours and never get the milk to the temperature where it could shut off. But the bulk tank does not have that problem. "It may have caused more commotion in the dairy industry than anything else," says Russ, "but it also did more for the quality of milk." The sanitary quality of milk has also been improved by the milking systems which carry the milk from the cow to the bulk tank: milk today reaches the consumer without having been touched by human hands.

From the single hand-milked family cow on the general farm of Ralph Buckley, to the machine-milked two-hundred head herd on the commercial farm of his grandsons Russ and Gib, the dairy industry has undergone a regular scientific revolution in the space of three generations. Ralph's farm was one of diversified production dictated mainly by the family's needs and guided by commonsense rather than science, a way of work providing minimal income but reaping many home benefits. His grandsons' farm, on the other hand, is highly specialized,

capital intensive, dictated in its doings by market demands, self-conceived as a science, and procuring year-round income but few direct home benefits. The Buckleys, as much as anyone outside the dairy industry, are amazed by the changes: Gib marvels at the fact that, in one load of milk picked up by his dealer, he gets more money than his grandfather did in a full year of farming. But the business is still called farming, the farmer is still a Buckley, and the farm is still in Leeds. And, of course, a cow is still called a cow—for now. These names, as meaningless as they seem, give the Buckleys and other long-time Leeds farm families a sense of continuity in the face of ongoing and sometimes ominous technological change.

The other agricultural development of post-war Leeds, however, had no such basis in tradition—not even a name tying it to the past. This was the broiler industry. The broiler was a brand-new creation, produced by poultry scientists. The industry was a brand-new business—an entrepreneurial response to the machines and markets of post-war America. “Used to be, everyone in Leeds had a flock of laying hens, and that’s what they ate,” says Gerald McNear, a poultry and dairy farmer on Campbell Road in North Leeds. Those areas of America that did not, like Leeds, have laying hens at their disposal considered chicken a specialty meat, expensive to grow and expensive to buy. Hence, says former poultry grower Charlie Barker, Hoover’s promise in the 1920s of “a chicken in every pot” was an image of luxury, the equivalent of a steak on every table today. In the forties, however, two technological innovations coincided to create the broiler industry. The grain states mechanized, lowering the cost of chicken feed; and science gave birth to the broiler, a cheap low-calory bird which appealed to an increasingly diet-conscious and fast-food hungry America. The agricultural future of Maine, shadowed by the imminent loss of the corn market, said “broilers.” And, at Leavitt Institute in Turner, the agricultural teacher told his class of would-be farmers from Leeds, “Think hens.”

Edgar Lane had been listening; and in 1946 he gave his hometown of Leeds its first two broiler houses, set along River Road in West Leeds.. But Edgar, like other novices in the new industry, ran into trouble with “chicken dust,” the combustible particles given off by chicken excrement. In the industry’s infancy, broiler houses were unwittingly built with their furnaces inside; chicken dust easily got into the furnaces and ignited. Edgar’s first house burned in 1955; when his second went in the winter of ’59, he got out of the broiler business for good.

Chicken dust not only ignited furnaces; it also infiltrated human lungs. Since those first broiler houses were not yet fully mechanized, the birds had to be fed and watered by hand and the ventilation had to be adjusted by opening and closing windows. Broiler growers spent a good bit of time inside those houses with the windows shut, breathing in chicken dust—with the result of a wide-spread rash of lung infections. Charlie Barker had a small-scale unmechanized broiler house in the early sixties, until driven from the business by a lung infection. Cad Morris had an egg farm for seventeen years on Fish Street, until emphysema forced his early retirement. As Cad’s brother-in-law Martin Alden points out, though, working in a

henhouse had one health benefit. "You never had to worry about cancer," he says, "because cancer couldn't live in there."

Despite the troubles of its first broiler houses, the new agricultural enterprise took root and rapidly grew. In 1946 there were 5,500 taxable fowl in Leeds; in 1967 the number had risen to nearly 100,000; by 1979 a single poultry farm in North Leeds had an annual output of 500,000 broilers. That farm, run by Gerald McNear, John Nutting, and Jeff McNear, was at this time the largest independent contract broiler-grower in New England, with two houses which held 91,000 birds at a time. Between 1956, when he went into the broiler business, and 1981, when he grew his last set of broilers, Gerald McNear saw both the broiler and the business transformed by new technologies. "When I built my first henhouse," he says, "I had 15,000 birds. Today it's far easier to take care of 91,000." The feed is now automatic; the water is now automatic; the only aspect not automatic is ventilation—and that is achieved not with windows but with remote-control fans. The broiler grower need not ever see the broiler he is growing. Meanwhile, the invisible bird has been transformed by scientific breeding into a whole new animal, twice as cost-efficient as its paltry predecessor. As Gerald explains, they can now raise a broiler on half the feed and in half the time that it took in 1946—and produce a bird that weighs more. "That's the breed," he says, "and that's the feed."

The technological innovations seen in broiler-growing and in dairying during the last few decades raise some interesting questions about the fast-fading line between agriculture and industry. The names we give to the creatures of this world signify not so much the creatures themselves as our relationship to them—what it is that they mean to us. The names adopted by the broiler industry indicate that the chicken has ceased to be an animal in our eyes, and has become an industrial product. The "broiler" is not a creature but a creation of technology, a bird so utterly transformed by the hands of human science that it is no longer called a chicken; and its new name indicates its single reason for being—human consumption. The work involved in growing broilers is thus no longer called farming or husbandry but "industry"—a difference which Gerald McNear discovered in the very nature of the work, and which he did not like. "Raising chickens that way is so unnatural," he complains. "It's like a chicken factory."

Similarly, the act of naming cows differentiates the "dairy farm" from the "milk factory." The thousand-herd milk factory (not yet seen in Leeds) does not register or name its animals: it simply numbers them. On the McNear-Nutting farm, as on Leeds' other dairy farms, however, cows are still registered and therefore given individual names. "Every cow is named, and to us they're individuals," says Gerald. "I couldn't do it any other way." The technical line between "agriculture" and "agribusiness" is, finally, measured by the volume of production. But the psychological line for the worker might better be measured by the way in which the animals are identified. A name, unlike a number, acknowledges the individual life as well as the productive capacity of an animal. As such, it signifies something more than a mere business relationship between a farmer and his animals.

The name of the game aside, the rules changed rapidly as Leeds agriculture mechanized in the post-war decades—and the number of people participating fell sharply. One man could now do the work of twenty laborers, if his dairy farm came well-equipped with all the modern machinery. Gone were the big farmers, the big hirers, the Lothrop and Lincolns of early twentieth-century Leeds. In their place, the Buckleys, Additons, Sanders and McNears ran extensive commercial operations with the help of a few family members, and maybe one hired hand. The poultry industry has provided a (very) limited number of jobs to Leeds laborers: in the 1970's, DeCoster Egg Farms of Turner built a grainery at the intersection of Routes 219 and 106 in Leeds, which hires a handful of men.

More significant new job sources in post-war Leeds came not from agriculture but the transportation industry. One such source was the Bancroft-Martin culvert-manufacturing plant, which went into business alongside Maine Sand and Gravel in 1940 and began making its own cement in 1945. By the early seventies, the culvert company had built a Spandex plant across the road and was hiring as many as sixty people for its crews and eight for its offices. A car-crushing plant also came to town in 1970. Meanwhile, the town road department and Maine Sand and Gravel continued to put men to work, although in each of these cases mechanization had decreased the needed number of laborers.

The transportation industry thus became a principal hirer of Leeds' displaced agricultural labor force: it put some men to work building roads, others to work providing the gravel for roadbeds and culverts for better drainage, and yet others to work crushing cars that had worn out. But the roads and the cars themselves provided many more Leeds people with jobs outside of Leeds. Drained and gravelled, tarred and plowed roads made commuting to the surrounding towns practicable for the first time—and so the residents of Leeds began to drive to the mills of Jay and Livermore Falls, the state offices of Augusta, the factories and service industries of Lewiston-Auburn.

Significantly, many of these jobs were taken by Leeds women. As we have seen, Leeds men and women had been two halves of the self-sustaining family farm. As nearby seasonal work gave way to far-flung full-time year-round employment for the man, his contributions to a family farm system became increasingly difficult to make. Mass-manufactured goods and home appliances, in turn, took over many of the contributions made by women to their family's living. But these manufactured goods and appliances cost money—and installment plans lured many young families into buying quickly and then paying continually. Both men and women went out to earn the needed cash. "That's why a woman goes to work," asserts Ocena Additon, "because a man can't afford to buy all these things." As Ocena's words suggests, the women's liberation movement of the late sixties and seventies had little to do with the motivations of local women for entering the labor force. In fact, a full decade before that movement began making headlines, more than fifty percent of the women in Androscoggin County did wage work. Feminism gave women's wage work philosophical affirmation—but the philoso-

phy is one to which few working women in Leeds subscribe. The ideal of female work is still one of contribution to the home and family, a contribution to be made by working in the home and with the family. The hard facts of a cash economy and the soft sells of the lay-away plan disrupt this ideal, however—and so Leeds women have often unwillingly left the home to enter the more public world of wage work. Significantly, the jobs they have found are public versions of the services they once more privately provided. They work in stores as sales personnel, selling the goods they once made at home. Or they become nurses, teachers, secretaries, day-care workers, house cleaners—taking care of the homes or health, offices or paper work, young children or aged parents, of others.

As the women and men of post-war Leeds began to drive to the cities to work, another equally important commuter pattern began to emerge, thanks to improved transportation opportunities. The working population of the nearby cities began to drive into Leeds to live. For the first time in more than a century, strangers were moving to town in large numbers. Between 1960 and 1970, the population of Leeds rose twenty-five percent. Between 1970 and 1980, it jumped another fifty percent, reaching a record high of 1,500 people. The expanding population meant, among other things, a lucrative new market in housing construction and real estate. Charlie Barker had lived in Leeds twenty years before he saw a new house being built: that first new house was Bill Smith's, at Curtis Corner, and the year was 1954. Ten years later, Charlie began building houses himself—houses for natives of Leeds and houses for couples moving to the "suburbs" from Lewiston and Augusta. Some of those who moved in did not buy new houses, but renovated old ones; a few even renovated the old farm way of life. These were the "back-to-the-landers" of the sixties, people attracted to the apparent simplicity and purity of rural life, attracted to the self-sufficiency of the general farm, and attracted to the unity of workplace and home which had once characterized life in Leeds. Many others, however, came in search of precisely the opposite: a separation of worklife and homelife. The workplace stayed in the noisy city, while the home moved to Leeds. An informal door-to-door survey taken by the Leeds Improvement Organization in 1978 found that ninety-eight percent of the working population of the town does not work in Leeds. The work done runs the gamut of occupations: Leeds has truck drivers, teachers, mill workers, ministers, psychiatrists, salespeople, nurses, neurosurgeons, woodcutters, writers, florists, lawyers, paralegals, and so on. But the town has no flower shops, no law offices, no hospitals, no department stores, no mills, no newspapers. It does have an elementary school; and yet the teachers who work there do not live in Leeds—and the teachers who live in Leeds work somewhere else. The intent, and the effect, is a careful separation of homelife and worklife in the town of Leeds.



In the last eighty years, then, the modes of work for Leeds people have undergone a major transformation. As the modes of work have changed, so too, the meaning of work has changed—and so too, the meaning of the home and the mean-

ing of the land. The change in modes has been one of separation between the townspeople and the land; the change in meanings has been one of separation between work and life.

In the creation story of Genesis, the land is the means of human existence: it is the clay from which Adam and Eve are fashioned. And the land is the most immediate end of human existence: it is the lifework of Adam and Eve "to fill the earth and subdue it." God may be the first and final cause of it all, but the visible earth embodies the meaning of life and work for the first human beings. It is, both literally and figuratively, the ground of their existence.

So too, in the general farm ways of turn-of-the-century Leeds, the land gave the townspeople the means of their existence: it provided them with the stuff of sustenance, their food and shelter. And the land gave the townspeople the immediate end of their existence: their lifework, with its seasonal patterns of production. As such, the land was the source both of sustenance and labor, of energy and activity. Like the earth in Genesis, it unified the meanings of work and human life; it was the ground of the townspeople's existence.

In the twentieth century, the town of Leeds has been taken from this ground by the pursuit, both local and national, of the fruits of technology. The earth and other natural resources of Leeds have proven frail, limited, and indeed all too easily "subdued," when confronted by the demands of advanced technology. The terrain is too broken up for the purposes of agribusiness; the climate too cold and grain too expensive for a poultry industry; the timberage too limited to withstand repeated raids by portable mills; the river too susceptible to pollution upstream and dams downstream. The land has not only been subdued; it has, in the words of one young man from Leeds, "been milked dry." Now, says that young man, his own generation "must find another beast to milk."

In order to find that "beast," Leeds people have left the land and headed into the city, pursuing a living in the form of wage work. The ground of existence has thus shifted, shattering the previous unity of work and life. Home, no longer a place of work, is preserved as a place of leisure, private and peaceful, removed from the public and noisy ways of wage work. And the land on which residents live is, with a few exceptions, no longer the source of their labor and living: it is, perhaps, a resource for leisure hours or a soothing setting for lifestyles, but it can no longer be considered the ground of their existence. This transformation, this shift in the very meaning of "life in Leeds," is perhaps most eloquently expressed by the fate of the old Lowell place on Route 202. Once a working farm of rolling pastures and fields, it is today a country club of rolling green golf courses. ♦♦♦

COMMUNITY

For the townspeople of Leeds, Maine, the eleventh of August, 1901, began with a bang—a fifty-gun salute fired from a cannon in Willard Lothrop's pasture. From that noisy sunrise to an equally resounding sundown, the eleventh of August was no ordinary day. Putting on their best dress and leaving behind daily routines, Leeds people came together to celebrate their community's movement through a single century.

The Centennial Celebration started, appropriately, with a spectacle of movement: a Grand Procession down the town's dusty roads. For lack of a local marching band, the organizing committee had borrowed one from Lewiston to lead the way. If the band was imported, however, the parade which followed was distinctly homegrown. Each of the town's eight schoolhouses contributed a carriage full of white-frosted children, with a banner announcing the school's name: Leeds Center, West Leeds, Gould's Corner, Brick Schoolhouse, Curtis Corner, Keen's Corner, Washington, Longfellow. Close behind the town children came the "town fathers," Leeds' governing officers, fitted thriftily into a single carriage. "They were a solid-looking body of men," remarked a reporter from the Lewiston Daily Journal, "and were an object lesson explaining why Leeds is one of the best governed towns in Maine." Another carriage, in honor of Uncle Sam, offered its own 'object lessons' in national government: it contained the Goddess of Liberty, flanked by her protectors, the Army and Navy, and was, in the Lewiston reporter's tactful phrase, "a daisy in its way." But the local farmers' fraternity, the Leeds Grange, "was not to be outdone in loyalty and patriotism:" it had provided select members with two handsome teams to pull their carriage through town. Over the grangers' heads a banner floated, proclaiming "Patrons of Husbandry Lodge # 99."

Prominent citizens who had found no place beneath the banners of Grange or government brought out their own double teams, each vying with the next for the interest and importance of its contents. Thomas Boothby, prosperous farmer and former state legislator, had especially precious cargo to display: his carriage carried the day's honored guests and speakers, among them Leeds' own native son, General Oliver Otis Howard. Meanwhile, local manufacturer Roscoe Swain contented himself with a carriage of twenty-five young women dressed in virginal white, who sang as they swung down the road.

From the white clothes of the schoolchildren to those worn by Swain's songstresses, from the banners advertising local government to those proclaiming the pride of the Grange, from one end of this Grand Procession to the other, Leeds presented itself to the world for inspection. Thus, concluded the Lewiston journalist, "The progress of the old town over the last hundred years was fully illustrated."

By describing the Grand Procession as illustrative of Leeds' "progress," the journalist acknowledged and honored the intention of this spectacle. The parade was not a complete catalogue of the community's contents in 1901. Its ranks did not include, for example, representatives of the six churches that once had dominated the social landscape of Leeds, but whose congregations had dwindled and even disappeared in the years since the Civil War. Nor did its ranks contain the many citizens whose hats and horses suggested poverty rather than prosperity—the women and men who picked corn in one season for Thomas Boothby and sawed slabs in another for Roscoe Swain. The Grand Procession did not, in short, admit of failures or fears. Instead it stressed Leeds' points of strength and success—those institutions and persons embodying the town's best hopes for itself in the century to come. There were the solid-bodied town officers, holding the reins of the town budget firmly in hand as they guided Leeds into the future. There too, at a comfortable distance, was the Federal government, its figures of Liberty and the Armed Forces assuring Leeds of both freedom and security. There was the Grange, recently but firmly established as the social center of the town, promising new pride and possibility for rural life. There were the successful entrepreneurs, the corn farmers and manufacturers, proving that prosperity remained within reach for the people of Leeds. And there, at the head of the procession, were eight carriage-loads of children whose "rosy cheeks and healthy vigor," in the words of the *Journal* reporter, "showed that the coming generation of Leeds would be equal to any of the past"—the children in whom the hopes and fears of coming years would be met.

Once the Grand Procession had run its course, the paraders climbed out of their carriages and, with a straightening of hats and smoothing of skirts, headed for the circus tent at Leeds Center. There, for the next few hours, they were tutored closely on the nature of Leeds' past progress and its future prospects. One after another, the day's speakers took to the podium as prophets to a mountain peak. Each speaker turned now this way, looking back at Leeds' past, and now that way, looking forward to its future; and each speaker found, in both directions, a landscape lively with change.

The first to approach the podium was Seth Howard, a farmer and former state legislator who had spent all seventy-three years of his life in Leeds. Standing metaphorically upon the "meridian of centuries," Howard told his audience the story of their town—a story which had begun with the American Revolution, would culminate in Heavenly Reunion, and was characterized throughout by the unimpeded march of Progress. The American Revolution had been ruled, he explained, by Darwin's law of the survival of the fittest. The weaker of the species

having "succumbed to the sufferings of the protracted struggle for independence," the stronger had come to Leeds and settled it. This "sturdy yeomanry" left succeeding generations a "grand inheritance"—not financial, Howard hastened to add, but "physical, moral, and patriotic." The generations had lived up to their legacy. Indeed they could do no wrong, for "a man's character is formed one hundred years before he is born."

But moral progress was just one part of Leeds' story. It had, Howard pointed out, been matched step for step by material improvements. Steam, typewriters, factories and friction matches—these were but a few of the "wonderful achievements" witnessed in his time, and they could only be improved upon in the century of invention to come. Standing so confidently among the many good things pouring from Time's cornucopia, Howard had but one sense of loss. It came with the memory of "those who will never return." But even this small cost of Time would, he assured his audience, be repaid in full in Eternity. "We may soon go to meet them," he cheerfully concluded and, stepping down to warm applause, handed the podium over to Frank Herrick.

Herrick's assignment was to welcome a special part of the audience: the sons and daughters of Leeds who, having strayed from home, had returned that day to pay tribute to the old town. Like Howard, Herrick began by suggesting that "by studying the past we may be the better able to plan for the future." Yet the same study yielded a very different vision for this somber young man of thirty. Looking back upon Leeds' first century, Herrick told a story more Biblical than Darwinian in tone, a story not of human evolution but of a people's decline. His story began with a journey into the wilderness: in vivid detail Herrick recounted the settlers' selfless sacrifices, their spiritual purposes, their unwavering faith in God. These ancestors had left behind a moral heritage. But the younger generation was not living up to that heritage; it had in recent years wandered from the path of "set and simple faith." Those tempting the young were summer visitors, city people and westerners—creatures whose unchurched habits had become a menace to "the morals of the young men and women of this new century." The menace was already making headway: Herrick described in chilling tones the decline of congregations and closing of church doors across Leeds. Unless that decline was reversed, he warned, the century of invention would prove instead to be a century of declension, a century of doom.

Still, Frank Herrick held out a hand of hope. Leeds had a destiny, however endangered—a destiny to be cultivated not in fine grain and fat cattle but in the more complicated fields of moral character. "My friends! The question of observing the Sabbath is one that should interest every father and mother in this town," cried Herrick. "If we want our boys and girls to be good citizens, let us teach them the catechism of morality." And with this the young man extended his chastened hearers "a most hearty welcome" and stepped down.

The Centennial Celebration was a day set aside from history—a day for Leeds to pause in its career, study its past, and plan for its future. But it was a day in the life as well. While speakers considered the meaning of Leeds' history, that history went on being made all around them, in the comedies and tragedies of private life, in the quiet but transforming introduction of new material comforts, in the town's ongoing quarrel with the outside world, and in its quarrels with itself.

In one corner of the fairgrounds, seven year-old Lester Merrill was learning to tie his shoe, the better to traverse—and eventually to leave—the landscape of Leeds. Nearby, Ernest Pickett was selling some brave and thirsty person the first bottle of soda pop in the history of Leeds. And down the middle of the fairgrounds, in that day's skirmish of their lifelong war, blacksmith John Collins was chasing blackskinned John Kemp, red-hot iron in hand.

Elsewhere in Leeds Center, a town father was complaining to the press about Those People in Augusta, who had demanded fifteen hundred dollars in bonds to secure the state cannon used in the sunrise salute. Grumbled the Leeds man, "It looks just a trifle like small business on the part of the commonwealth." Meanwhile, unknown to that town father, his precious cannon had been hauled out of Willard Lothrop's pasture and up Monument Hill by young Perley McGuire and some of his friends. While Perley was still ramming in the powder and charge, another boy impatiently ignited the fuse. The resulting explosion blew the ramrod so far that no one ever found it and left Perley's face blue with powder burns for the rest of his days.

But Willard Lothrop was not worrying too much about cannons disappearing from his pasture. Far below Monument Hill, in a much quieter corner of the grounds, the elderly farmer was busy advising his ten year-old friend Guy Buckley to enjoy the Centennial while it lasted. "After all," said Willard, "you won't live to see another." Those words impressed young Guy with a sense of history far more than the formal fuss of the Celebration itself.

As Willard Lothrop understood, the Centennial Celebration was an extraordinary day in the history of Leeds. And yet, through the revelry, ritual and rhetoric, it spoke precisely of the ordinary: it spoke of a group of people, their public and their private faces, the daily incidents and accidents of their common life—all the many threads which, woven together, comprise the complex fabric we call a "community." When the revels that day were ended and the pageantry dissolved, when the teams had retired to their stables and the speakers to their farms, when the flood of visitors had receded, well-fed and God-spiced, back down the road, and when the townspeople of Leeds turned back to their daily lives—these were the threads they picked up, and this the common life they went on weaving. The following chapter will trace that fabric of community through the twentieth century, as it has been formed in the daily life, informed by the fears, and reformed by the hopes of the people of Leeds.

PARTIES OF HOPE: 1901

The Centennial Celebration honored not Leeds's settlement but its moment of incorporation—its recognition as a single body corporate, with a shared name and a shared system of self-government. Looking back at that moment from a comfortable distance in 1901, local historian J.C. Stinchfield painted the motivations of the men who had sought incorporation in heroic hues of red, white and blue. The settlers came "out to a new wild country . . . with a fixed purpose of subduing and civilizing it," wrote Stinchfield in his *History of Leeds*, "and effected the establishment of a government the equal of which the sun has never warmed or lighted."

According to the settlers themselves, however, motives for incorporation were more pragmatic than heroic. Early in the winter of 1800, sixty-one male residents of the new settlement sent a petition to the Massachusetts legislature (Maine was only a district of Massachusetts at the time), in which they described their longings for incorporation thus:

That whereas we are now deprived of many important advantages, from our present situation, which we would otherwise enjoy as a body corporate, and as we are zealous to obtain all the priviledges [sic], which as citizens we are entitled to, and the many inconveniences resulting from transacting business in our present capacity must be considered . . . the great necessity of Public Grammar Schools, must be apparent, the bad state of the roads, can in no way be improved, which is an object of magnitudge [sic] to ourselves, as well as to the public . . . From these considerations, we are induced to pray for an act of Incorporation, for your petitioners, with all the priviledges, and immunities, of a body corporate, by the name of Cuba.

The Massachusetts legislature answered their prayer a year later with a bill proclaiming, not 'let there be Cuba,' but 'let there be Leeds.' Perhaps the settlers had changed their opinion of Cuba: perhaps the Massachusetts legislature, as it was wont to do, had changed the settlers' minds—and name—for them.

The town's new system of government, like its new name, came from Massachusetts, where it had been developed and refined over several centuries of New England village life. Members of the body corporate met annually in a public "town meeting" to elect officers and pledge funds for the common needs of the coming year. Power was broadly dispersed among a variety of officers, each attending to a particular public need. The first town meeting, held in the spring of 1801, saw elections for a grand total of thirty-nine offices, which voters distributed among twenty-eight men. They chose a committee of six to supervise schools; a committee of six to oversee highways; a clerk; a treasurer; a pound-keeper; a tax collector; four fence viewers; four tithing men; a surveyor of boards; a sealer of weights and measures; a viewer and sealer of brick moles; five hog reeves; four

field drivers; and, finally, three selectmen and assessors to oversee the more general affairs of the town.

These last officers took their title and job description from a seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay ordinance requiring the election of "a select person to order the planting and prudential occasions of said town." A slightly later ordinance had added that the person should be not only select but "fit, . . . of discreet conversation and inhabiting within said town." Apparently Leeds' first selectmen lacked these qualities. Within one year of the first town meeting, voters decided to impeach them. In order to do so, however, they had to call a special meeting, and in order to call that meeting they had first to obtain the permission of their selectmen—who refused to give it.irate townspeople soon beat a path (probably quite literally) to the home of the nearest Justice of the Peace, who ordered the selectmen to do their duty. At the special meeting, two of the three officers were replaced. (If Leeds' selectmen were quick to sin, though, the citizens were equally quick to forgive: both of the impeached men soon returned to "positions of trust" in the town government.)

Thus Leeds had an early lesson in the uses and abuses of representative government. The following century saw no further crises of this kind. It did, however, witness a gradual redistribution of political power. As business relations standardized with the expansion of local markets, such regulatory offices as hog reeve, sealer of brick moles, and surveyor of weights and measures were dismantled. Fence viewers were only appointed in times of need, when neighbors fell to fighting over the placement or maintenance of a shared fence. And, as old needs fell away, new needs began afflicting the body corporate, and new offices arose to meet them. In 1831, Leeds' residents voted their first appropriation for poor relief and appointed three "Overseers of the Poor" to administer the fund. They chose to combine the new position with that of selectman—a step toward centralized government which would profoundly affect the treatment of Leeds' poor in coming years. So, too, in education, centralization was the trend. Until 1893, the town divided itself into as many as thirteen school districts, each of which bore the brunt of financial and administrative responsibility for the education of its own young. When the State abolished the district system in 1893, Leeds began electing a single supervisor who, with the assistance of a committee of three, directly managed all local schools.

In this way the patterns of government in the town changed in the course of the nineteenth century, with political power gradually gathering in the persons of a few town officers. Yet the town's autonomy over its own affairs remained unchallenged. When it celebrated its hundredth year as a body corporate, Leeds still provided the vast majority of funding for its own roads, schools, and poor relief; it still elected local persons to supervise the spending of those funds; and it still decided both its budget and its officers at the annual town meeting.



Town meeting, as practiced in 1901, was an all-day affair held the first Monday in March, after the worst of winter but before the onset of mud season. If, as sometimes happened, the weather did not cooperate with the calendar, townspeople could still count on the clearest roads possible; for their road commissioner had much to lose in the political arena that day if poor travelling conditions had maddened the minds of voters. The town house at Leeds Center hosted the meeting, while barns of nearby farms accommodated the teams of travellers from other areas of town. The day's events were scheduled to suit a farmer: meeting convened at 10:00 a.m. after morning milking and ended just as evening chores called voters home. A noon break divided the day into two sessions, with elections in the morning session and budgetary business in the afternoon. Women had no vote until 1920; so, while the men went about the morning's business of electing one another, the women met at a nearby home to brew coffee and make sandwiches, which they took to the town house at noontime to sell to their husbands, fathers, brothers and sons. Men who lived in Leeds Center could retire to their own kitchens for dinner; others converged on Will Francis' store to buy cigars, swap post-election reflections and plot strategies for the budgetary battles to come. Cider was the most popular strategy for some—they would find their way to the nearest barrel to fuel up for the afternoon. One year they did not have far to go. Raleigh Knapp, having just been elected to his first term as selectman, celebrated the victory by setting up a keg behind the town house and keeping a free hand on the spigot.

With dinner done, the men of the town, often in the company of interested women and children, re-entered the town house with a full stock of cigars and settled in to consider the coming year's budget. In the arena of national politics, turn-of-the-century Leeds boasted a broad variety of parties and allegiances: a national election brought out not only the usual Republicans and Democrats but card-carrying Socialists, Progressives, and Prohibitionists. In local politics, however, as Gib Buckley recalls, there were only two factions: "the conservatives and the ultra-conservatives."

Conservatism had its roots in many aspects of New England village life; not least of these was the character of town meeting itself. Consider, for a moment, the ingredients that entered into the making of a town budget in early twentieth-century Leeds. Fifty, perhaps seventy-five persons enter a small room at midday. Some are warm with cider, most are full of food. One man wants his road sanded. Another, the husband of a schoolteacher, seeks telephones for the schoolhouses. The town farm overseer wants "living water" for his establishment. The road commissioner has spent the past year coveting the next town's new snowroller, while the school supervisor dreams of new roofs for the schoolhouses. Every dollar approved will add a few pennies to the voter's tax bill, a condition which can make even the gravest necessities seem suspiciously extravagant. Moreover, the men asking for these frills are not simply disinterested civic officials. They are your neighbor or estranged brother, your master or moneylender, your coworker in the field or competitor at the nearby market. Cigar smoke obscures the air, giving the

room a blue hue—and personal issues just as surely obscure the public ones. In such an atmosphere, “nays” come much more easily than “ayes.”

Interestingly, the largest appropriations, those hefty hundred- and thousand-dollar sums sought for the schools and roads, provoked the least debate. It was the minor request, the little bit of butter for the other man’s bread, that got argument going and rhetoric rising. For money was not the only object. What mattered as much was the opportunity to argue before an appreciative audience—and to do so in a well-structured moment, kept orderly by parliamentary rules and by the prospect of facing one another the next day. “People’d argue some,” says one town meeting veteran in classic understatement, “But they’d shake hands afterward.”

The same rhetorical games, the same room with its blue light, the same time of the year and, decade after decade, the same cast of characters made Leeds town meeting an annual theatrical event as much as a business meeting. Yet the final product of town meeting was still a budget for the year to come. The selectmen carried away a set sum of money and the responsibility for meeting the most urgent needs of Leeds with it—a task requiring dedication, determination and, if not callousness, at least a certain skepticism in the face of human need.

The job of selectmen had uncertain rewards and many sure costs. As Warren Grant says, it has always been the fastest road to unpopularity in town. In return for being allowed to ride that road, selectmen received a mere pittance of pay (less than one hundred dollars a year) and gave many hours in return. They had to be available to the public whenever that public came calling, be it the dinner hour or the midnight hour. The job was therefore best suited to persons working at home, which was a fairly easy qualification to fill in a world of farmers. But it was also best suited to persons of some wealth: first, because it paid so little and took time from other means of making a living; second, because it required financial skill to make a budget so small stretch to meet the needs of a struggling farm community. Leeds’ selectmen had to be good businessmen—and the townspeople looked for good businessmen among those who had succeeded in their own businesses first. Other public qualities like grace, humor, and civic vision undoubtedly helped, but the selectman’s most valued trait was a careful hand on the reins of town spending. The biographical sketch of Isaiah B. Additon in the town history of 1901 serves well as a job description for the perfect selectman. “He was,” we are told, “a very useful citizen. A firm and conscientious official, and opposed anything like extravagance in the administration of town affairs.”

“Extravagance” is a relative term, of course. One man’s meat is the next man’s dessert: one woman’s need, the next woman’s frill. In distinguishing need from extravagance, Leeds selectmen used a set of measures based upon the economic and social ideals of a community of small family farms. According to those ideals, each small family farm had the resources and the skills needed to provide basic sustenance for its residents. Survival required neither investment capital nor education—just one’s own farm and a few hands willing to work it. Each family,

therefore, could and should "take care of its own." To be sure, not all farms were created equal in quality or in quantity; but such inequalities were viewed as the inevitable result of a family's own work habits, or lack thereof. As Rawl Knapp, selectman of thirty-eight years, liked to remark, "You could take all the land and money in Leeds and divide it up equally, and the next year the large farmers would have it all back." Another New Englander, Ralph Waldo Emerson, had put the same perception more poetically. "Property has been well compared to snow—," he wrote, "if it fall level today, it will be blown in drifts tomorrow."

Not every needy person in town was blamed for his or her hard times. The life of the farmer was fraught with misfortunes—a fire, a drought, a sudden death in the familial labor force. But the victims of these events were considered the "unfortunate," as to be distinguished from the "worthless" poor. The unfortunate poor deserved sympathy and charity from their community; moreover, if given a hand, they would pull themselves up and remain standing on their own feet. And, in the case of the unfortunate, it was the informal community rather than the formal town government that held out that hand. The Grange and other voluntary associations collected clothing for those who had been burned out; neighbors brought food, helped rebuild houses, or lent a hand around the barn. Implicit in this approach, of course, was the assumption that the informal community knew, without being told, about the needs of its residents—and that it knew enough about those residents to distinguish the fruits of misfortune from the fruits of sloth or intemperance.

If needing greater aid than neighbors or local voluntary associations could provide, a stricken resident might approach the selectmen for "relief." But the "unfortunate" poor were by definition too proud to do that. "Used to be, people wouldn't ask for help unless it was really a necessity," recalls Gib Buckley. "Used to be, they'd starve to death before they'd ask. It was a dishonorable thing." Hence there was something of a Catch-22 to town poor relief: those who truly deserved help would not ask for it, and those who asked for help proved themselves undeserving!

Regardless of the judgement it passed upon the poor, however, Leeds still had a legal responsibility to "take care of its own"—and any person who had lived in Leeds for five years without receiving poor relief qualified, legally if not always sentimentally, as one of Leeds' own. The selectmen thus faced a dual task, a task both monetary and moral. They had to respond to need among their own citizenry; and yet they had to make a moral lesson of that need, punishing the caller and discouraging any further dependence.

They did so with a poor relief system that provided no more relief than was absolutely essential, humiliated the indigent publicly, and therefore ostensibly discouraged others from seeking aid. A person who sought relief had first to pay a visit to the selectmen and make a case for his or her need. If convinced, the selectmen arranged to provide just what was needed—nothing more. Thus, if someone

proved that he was "truly" cold, the selectmen would call up the wood dealer of their choice and order a cord to be delivered. If someone proved that she was "truly" hungry, the selectmen left an order at their favorite store for the merchant to give that someone a bag of flour. Public assistance funds remained within the local economy, enriching local merchants—or at least those merchants who had good relations with the selectmen. At the year's end all such transactions were published in the annual town report, including the names of the needy, the names of the merchants, the kind of help given, and its cost to the town.

In this highly publicized fashion, Leeds' poor received just enough food, fuel and health care to stay alive until, ideally, they could stand on their own again. But there were also people whose needs far exceeded an occasional cord of wood or bag of flour—the homeless, disabled and disowned members of the community. For these townspeople, Leeds had several different solutions. Indigents who could do a day's work were "farmed out": that is, the town government hired them out to farmers, sometimes in Leeds, sometimes in another town. The person earned money for doing what work he could, and the town paid the employer a small stipend for the person's room and board. Those who could not work were sent to the town farm, which occupied the old Knapp homestead on Ridge Road, overlooking the Dead River. In the nineteenth century it had been a profit-making enterprise which, under the supervision of an elected overseer, not only housed indigents but produced and marketed wool, lumber, vegetables and dairy products for the town treasury. The success of the enterprise declined with the years and lack of town upkeep, however, and in 1910 Leeds stopped electing overseers; instead, it rented the farm to local families or individuals who worked the land for their own profit and received town money for the boarding and care of inmates.

The town farm overseers and, later, the renters seldom stayed at the job more than a year or two. Undoubtedly they found themselves overwhelmed and under-prepared for the task they had taken on—not simply the running of a farm but round-the-clock care of a group of persons with a wide assortment of needs. Town farm inmates occasionally included persons who had fallen on hard times toward the end of an otherwise prosperous life. One elderly man, for instance, found his savings drained by his wife's terminal illness; without family to care for him, he had no place to go but the town farm. Children were also among the inmates, for the farm gave burned-out or otherwise homeless families a place to live—although state law ensured that children would be temporary guests, remaining no longer than six months. Then there were visiting tramps, who (probably involuntarily, at times) spent the night in a room rumored to have bars on its windows, to be sent on their endless way out of town in the first light of day.

But the principal and more permanent inmates were neither bankrupt nor burned out, neither children nor tramps, but elderly men who had suffered a variety of disturbing fates. In the first decade of the twentieth century, the town farm averaged only four inmates: all men, all over the age of sixty. Two of them had, in

earlier years, been written up in local papers for alcoholic antics. They had spent their summer days picking blueberries to sell for hard cider, fighting one another, and being arrested for creating public disturbances. A third inmate, Bill Brigham, had spent all his adult life on the town farm. Of the man Bill Brigham, little is known; but of the legend Bill Brigham, a great deal has been said. He was famed for the foolishness of his favorite pursuits, among them catching grasshoppers to eat. He also gave Leeds a local idiom for idiocy: "You don't know as much as Bill Brigham." That saying long outlived Brigham himself, surviving as a favorite taunt of schoolchildren in Leeds and even in towns beyond.

The town farm served, in short, as a catch-all for persons whose needs far exceeded the resources of their own family or neighborhood. Impoverished old age, homelessness, mental illness, alcoholism, physical or developmental disability—all the categories into which we sort "problem" people today—were in earlier years collapsed into one solution, one institution: the town farm. Seeking neither to rehabilitate nor to cure, the farm simply kept "problems" or "pests" out of the community's way. The disgrace of being sent to the local "pesthouse" was implicit, but the town government made it explicit as well. As with all poor relief recipients, it printed the names of farm residents in the annual town report, and it continued its humiliation of them into the grave, publishing the funeral's cost to the taxpayers of Leeds, a cost kept to the bare minimum by burial in an unmarked "pauper's grave."

As such acts of humiliation reveal, poor relief was not regarded simply as a financial or administrative task. It was, in the eyes of its administrators, a deeply moral task, a matter of managing the values of the community. The selectmen were called "town fathers" precisely because, like fathers, they self-consciously represented and protected local values for future generations. And for better and for worse, Leeds' town fathers most clearly expressed those values in their treatment of failure, of the poor in their own community.



Like poor relief, education was a local affair for turn-of-the-century Leeds. Nearly half of the funds for schools came from the State, but the town raised the other half at its annual meeting and elected members of its own community to administer them. School supervisors were not professional educators any more than selectmen were professional politicians. Natives of Leeds, they earned their livings as farmers, doctors, horse breeders, and merchants and had, at most, taught school for a few terms when younger. Perhaps the most experienced superintendent to grow from local soil was Laura Sylvester: a graduate of Farmington Normal School, she taught in five different Maine towns before returning to Leeds in 1890 to serve two consecutive terms as its school superintendent. Sylvester had the further distinction of being the first woman elected to public office in Leeds his-

tory—an event which local historian J. C. Stinchfield accurately if ambivalently termed “a radical departure from the established order of things.” The departure was brief-lived. In 1893 Sylvester once again left Leeds, to be succeeded in her post by brother-in-law Frank Herrick. And indeed, if Sylvester was the exception, Herrick proved the rule: a man whose experience in educational administration was limited to several terms of teaching in Leeds schools, his primary educational interest, as evinced by his Centennial Celebration speech, lay less in the catechism of the ABCs than “the catechism of morality.”

The teachers who staffed Leeds’ schoolhouses at the turn of the century were, like the superintendents, culled from the community. Unlike their superiors, however, they were often young—and almost always female. The extent of their preparation for teaching varied widely. Several of the teachers employed had attended the state normal school. Others had received their “teacher training” in their final year at Leavitt High School in Turner, by lending a hand to the teacher in the one-room schoolhouse across the road. One of the eight teachers employed in 1901 was still in high school herself. Young local women with no formal training had several qualifications in their favor. They did not cost the town room and board if assigned to the school in their neighborhood; they were often willing to work for less than teachers from out of town, simply to have a job near home; and, without certification, they could not demand the pay scale of a “professional.” So too, they would work for less than a local man, who expected more pay simply because he had at his disposal other means for making money. (Elementary-school teaching in Leeds and elsewhere in America had, in fact, been the province of young men until the middle of the nineteenth century; but when school supervisors discovered that women were willing to do the job for less, teaching rapidly became a “woman’s occupation”—meaning that wages fell too low to make it worth a man’s time.)

If measured by the educational standards of late twentieth-century American life, Leeds’ common schools would be found badly lacking—bare in their budgets, and supervised and staffed by untrained and transient persons. But the school system then sought to meet a very different set of needs from that of today. Education had throughout the nineteenth century been mainly the domain of the family. Harsh weather and poor roads made regular school attendance impossible; but more important, the children of farm families were working members, and students only in their spare time. If a family was having trouble feeding itself, the children were expected to take paying jobs whenever possible and save their schooling for idle times. A common school education was, after all, not preparing the child for farming. That preparation took place at home, at the side of one’s parents, watching and imitating their efforts. Indeed, schooling might even impair the farmer of the future, by weakening the body and distracting the mind with unnecessary ideas and ideals. The town history profile of one well-educated man, Elisha Sylvester (the great-great-grandfather of Superintendent Laura Sylvester), indicates, albeit with some sympathy, the fate of the excessively learned in the farm world of Leeds. According to this chronicle, Elisha had “more education than was common to the times and an ability for writing poetry, but he lacked ability to meet the realities of

life." Education, in other words, was hardly a helpmeet, and sometimes a hindrance, for "the realities of life."

The Leeds common school did not strive to equip children for the realities of life as future farmers. That was the domain of the family farm. Nor did it prepare them for higher education and, in time, a profession. Instead, it prepared them for citizenship in the community, and it did so by instilling the virtues of self-discipline, industry, and obedience to authority. The annual reports written by Leeds' superintendents present a clear educational philosophy, one which focuses almost exclusively on the moral character and economic self-sufficiency of the town's future citizens. E. E. Additon, a four-term education officer in turn-of-the-century Leeds, set out that philosophy simply and severely in one of his statements. "Ignorance," he wrote, "is the mother of pauperism and crime." Whenever a superintendent sought higher appropriations from the town at the annual meeting, he pleaded his case by playing on town fears of a slothful, even criminal populace. Thus, in stressing the need for schoolhouse repairs in his annual report of 1915, Superintendent Lindley Parker did not appeal to local concern about the health of the schoolchildren; he did not present a cost-benefit analysis by pointing out that an education impeded by cold drafts and leaky roofs might be so much wasted effort and expense. Instead, he stressed the relationship between a sound building and the formation of moral character in Leeds' future citizens. "Realizing that the schools are of most vital importance in forming character, we cannot make the buildings and surroundings too attractive," he argued. "Let us raise more money, for the good of our boys and girls, and in so doing impress upon their young minds the need of their help in keeping the town's property tidy." Parker's appeal succeeded in increasing the school repairs appropriation thirty-three percent—to two hundred dollars.

The educational intent of the Leeds school system made the pursuit of discipline, rather than knowledge, the primary business of the schoolroom. As one teacher of early twentieth-century Leeds schoolchildren, Ocena Additon, notes approvingly, the point was to teach children to respect authority, to sit still, and to recite the facts. Learning took place by "rote," or memorization; hence self-discipline, not the much heralded self-expression of more recent educational philosophies, was the key to good scholarship. In keeping with this emphasis, the honor roll for Leeds schools was compiled annually on the basis of attendance: honor students were pupils who had not been absent even one half-day during a term. Academic skills were of secondary importance—and perhaps a means, less than an end, to the pursuit of discipline. Indeed, throughout the nineteenth century there were no graded standards for academic achievement at all; instead of passing from one grade level to the next, students could go to school just as long or as little as they or their parents wanted.

The academic standards of a Leeds common school education in this period are hard to calculate now, especially since they concerned the writers of annual reports so little. But several facts do suggest that the common school fell short of

the most modest goal of giving its graduates adequate preparation for high school. In 1873, Maine began offering townships matching funds for the operation of tuition-free high schools, and Leeds made use of the arrangement to offer a high school course almost every year. In 1897, however, the State added a small stipulation to its funding: it imposed minimum academic standards for students attending the free high school and required examinations of entering scholars to make sure that they measured up. This, as Lucy Sylvester Herrick later wrote, "had the effect of discontinuing the free high school in Leeds." In less tactful language, not enough Leeds' common school graduates could pass the examination to qualify for state funding of a high school. When, in 1901, the town decided to "grade" its schools (that is, to divide the student body of each school into graded levels of achievement), teachers gave examinations to determine the position of each student in the hierarchy. Only eighteen out of twenty-five of the town's would-be "graduates" passed the examination indicating readiness for high school.

And yet, as has been noted, the first intention of the Leeds common school system was not to prepare children for higher education. It aimed to prepare them for citizenship, by encouraging qualities which the community conceived to be crucial to the health of its body corporate. Parents may have had educational expectations and dreams for their children which transcended the common school philosophy. Some may have wanted their children trained in a more reliable or profitable profession than farming; some may have valued the acquisition of knowledge for its own sake; others may have hoped, as did Oliver Otis Howard's hard-driving mother, to give their children an education as "a road out" of the Leeds world they had always wanted to leave. But these were private aims, not public ends—and they were to be pursued at private expense, not at a cost to the community.



Through its town government, school system and poor relief system, the body corporate of turn-of-the-century Leeds sought to meet its most pressing common needs, and it did so in ways expressive of particular creeds, creeds based upon the conditions and expectations of life in a community of small family farms. But Leeds then, as Leeds now, was more than a community bound by need. Its residents lived together in another way as well—as a group of people sharing, at the most profound level, hopes and fears about the future, and believing that those hopes and fears would finally be met in their common life. They shared, in short, not simply a physical world but a dream. This level of "community" found its original and perhaps most powerful expression in the first community events known to take place in the town: the religious revivals of 1794.

Contrary to much comforting nostalgia about the Christianity of Leeds' founders, the settlers were not at first a particularly pious lot. According to one of them, Thomas Francis, the original "inhabitants were wholly inattentive to their eternal

concerns . . . all seemingly content to live without God in the world." The first minister who attempted to introduce God into Leeds was a visiting preacher of the Freewill Baptist persuasion; a man of little patience, he soon decided the spiritual condition of the settlement to be beyond saving and, observing to the townspeople "how long he had labored in vain among them," took his leave. The next preacher to pass through the settlement, a Methodist, arranged a meeting but did not even bother to show up for it.

People already having gathered, however, settler Thomas Francis decided to seize the opportunity himself. A recent convert to Christianity, unordained but full in his faith, he went ahead and led the meeting, using Psalm 51 as scripture and as hymn. The psalm begins with an individual's confession of sin and plea for God's forgiveness:

Wash away all my guilt
and cleanse me from my sin.
For well I know my misdeeds,
and my sins confront me all the day long.

Yet, as the psalm proceeds, we learn that the individual is not alone in sin—and therefore cannot be alone in salvation. God's mercy will come to the community, Israel, rather than to the sinner alone. Indeed, only if the community is cleansed of sin can the single soul find salvation.

Let it be thy pleasure to do good to Zion,
to build anew the walls of Jerusalem.
Then only shalt thou delight in the appointed sacrifices;
then shall young bulls be offered on thy altar.

In selecting Psalm 51, Francis called his fellow settlers together as a community: he appealed not simply to their private convictions of guilt and desire for forgiveness but to their sense of possibility in a new and shared world. His call was heard. The meeting rapidly grew into a religious awakening and ended with a resolution never to let another Sabbath pass in the settlement without public worship.

The next revival to be held in town that fateful fall of 1794 was a Methodist meeting conducted by itinerant preacher Jesse Lee. This meeting, too, was imbued with a distinct community spirit. According to a Methodist memoirist, Lee later said of the Leeds meeting, "It appeared as if the whole neighborhood was about to turn to God."

When God finally came to Leeds, then, He came not just to individuals but to the community itself. And He came carrying promises of a special destiny, not simply for individuals, but for the new town: Leeds would be "the New Jerusalem." This promise gave Leeds' first generation a common vision transcending the

trials of private life—and the churches established in the wake of revival provided the ground for cultivating and harvesting that vision.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, Leeds had six different church groups, each advocating its own brand of bricks for the walls of the New Jerusalem. There were First Baptists, Second Baptists, and Freewill Baptists; there were Universalists, Quakers and Methodists. And, for a time, the resolution of 1794 never to let another Sunday pass in Leeds without public worship probably went unbroken. In the aftermath of the Civil War, however, the population and economic prospects of the town began their joint decline—and the walls of the New Jerusalem, or at least of Leeds' churches, came tumbling down, too. The Quakers were the first to pack up and leave; the Second Baptists were, appropriately, second; finally the Freewillers faded away. The Universalists built an elegant new church on Meeting House Hill in 1872, but they did so more to spite the First Baptists next door than to house any worship services; from the beginning, the congregation only used its new building during the summer months. Meanwhile, in the shadow of the new Universalist steeple, Leeds' First Baptists continued to hold weekly meetings, as did the Methodists over on Quaker Ridge, but their ministers faced fewer faces from the pulpit every year.



In describing this sad state of spiritual affairs for the town history of 1901, the various spokespersons for Leeds' denominations ascribed the decline to the "deaths and removals" of members. But the rapid rise of another kind of organization in the 1880s proved that Leeds still had plenty of living and lively joiners. The organization they were joining, however, was not a church but a fraternity. It bound people together not on the grounds of faith in God but on the grounds of faith in farming. It provided a vision of Leeds not as the New Jerusalem but as a prosperous and cultured agricultural community. It was subordinate lodge #99 of the National Order of the Patrons of Husbandry —better known as the Leeds Grange.

The Patrons of Husbandry had sprung from midwestern soil in 1867. Styling itself as the world's only rural fraternity and dedicating itself to promoting the interests of American farmers, the organization quickly spread both south and east, founding 20,000 member lodges, or "granges" in just seven years. In 1875, a grange official from the neighboring town of Wayne, Maine, was sent to Leeds to found a new lodge. The organization he effected lasted less than a year; it seems that, like other lasting social institutions in Leeds, the Grange could not be inspired by an outsider, but had to be kindled from within the town. Only when an avid granger moved to Leeds in 1883 and dove right into local life did the town develop a lasting interest in the Patrons of Husbandry.

The man who brought the Grange to Leeds had, indirectly, been brought to Leeds by the Grange. A. T. Clifford had owned his own farm in Benton, Maine, and had been an active participant in the Grange of neighboring Freedom. As his

son later wrote, Clifford's agricultural ideas "grew with the years and the teachings of the Grange," and in 1883 he decided to act upon some of those ideas. He abandoned his own small farm in Benton and went to work as a hired hand at Chapel Hill Farm in Leeds, a prosperous commercial dairy farm operated on the experimental system of "shares," in which the persons who worked the farm shared in its profits. No sooner had he settled in at Leeds Center than Clifford began preaching the granger's gospel to his neighbors—and by 1885 the Leeds Grange had been resurrected.

At first the organization used the vacant vestry of the new Universalist Church for its meetings, paying twelve dollars annually for the privilege. By 1887, however, membership had expanded enough to warrant a Grange hall for Leeds. A. T. Clifford's employer, Peter Lane, donated property at the foot of Chapel Hill; patrons sold each other bonds to raise funds and held bees to raise beams; and a mere four months after striking the first nail, the members of Lodge #99 moved into their new home. Ten years later they raised the roof again, to make room for yet more new grangers. By 1901 the Grange had 151 adult members (in a town with a total population of 1,065) and could justly call itself "the center for social intercourse" in the town of Leeds.

If the Grange was the social center of Leeds, the social center of the Grange was undoubtedly its Saturday Program. This event took place in the large meeting room on the second floor of the Grange Hall, a room warmed by a well-tended wood stove, fronted by a stage and hung with a large portrait of Oliver Hudson Kelley, founder of the National Order of the Patrons of Husbandry. Every other Saturday, Kelley's image watched over a daylong program which followed his three-pronged approach to rural self-improvement: fraternity, education, and association. The program began midmorning, after farm chores were finished, with a ritual of passwords and marches, proceeded on to a business session and then broke midday for a "feast" (the usual fare was potluck or baked beans, but special occasions called for oyster stew). After dinner, members reconvened in the afternoon for education and entertainment. The educational program was overseen by an annually elected Lecturer. Ocena Additon, who served in that post, recalls arranging for a broad variety of activities and topics. Sometimes she brought in outside speakers to address agricultural issues or congressmen to argue political positions, but these were exceptions to the rule. "Mainly, we did our own amusing," says Ocena. "We assigned people papers to write on anything—history, humor." The stated purpose of the Grange was, of course, to further the interests of the farmer. But in turn-of-the-century Leeds, farming was a way of life as much as a trade—and so almost anything, from the agricultural to the purely cultural, could be construed to "interest" the farmer. Indeed, as the title of one early lecture—"The Best way to Manage a Husband"—suggests, the Patrons of Husbandry patronized all kinds of husbandry, human as well as animal.

The Saturday program was for due-paying members only: in order to get in the door one had to give the "gatekeeper" a password. But the Grange sponsored a

stream of other more public activities, too. Saturday night entertainments, for which the Grange hall doors were thrown open to all, often included a drama; the names of the many plays performed and their stars were faithfully scrawled on the walls backstage afterward. Popular farces and dramatic monologues predominated—fun if forgettable items bearing titles like “Tessie of the Hills,” or “The Sweetest Rose in Dixie.” The dramatic entertainment was frequently followed by an oyster stew supper and a dance, during which young women like Stella Libby could look forward to being swung off the ground on the energetic arm of Doc Russell. There were whist parties as well and, for a brief time in the 1920s, the Grange ran its own cinema, showing silents for a dime a seat while a local pianist played along on the Grange piano. The Grange also hosted an annual “Children’s Day,” which brought the children of Leeds’ many schoolhouses together to run booths, perform recitations and put on dramas of their own. One year the juvenile population of Leeds put on an operetta, with each school practicing its own part in isolation until Children’s Day, when all the voices came together for the first and final time.

And every fall there was the town fair, sponsored by the Grange and held on its property. For men, this meant exhibits and contests in every agricultural category from cattle to poultry, horse-pulling to produce. For women, it meant awards for the best canned goods, baked goods, dairy display, needlework, embroidery, crocheting, silk quilt, handmade bedspread, and mixed bouquet. Each schoolhouse had its own booth, where children displayed their best papers from the past year. Even the babies had a contest of their own, with prizes provided by local merchants for traits ranging from bluest eyes to baldest head. Toward evening, fair-goers moved into the Grange hall for a drama, beano game, dance, and, of course, the inevitable oysters, stewed to be served up at midnight.

The Leeds fair drew a large and varied crowd together. It gave many who had moved away from Leeds a convenient excuse to visit, creating something of an annual “Old Home Day,” and its events attracted spectators and contestants from surrounding towns as well. But mainly it was a day for the townspeople themselves, an event to look and work toward; a day which brought men out of their own fields, women out of their homeworlds, and children out of their separate schools, to share and compare, exalt and, in some cases, despair, the year’s labors; a day in which private endeavor was given public light and recognition.

The rise of the Grange to social dominance in Leeds can be attributed in part to the fact that it gave townspeople a much-needed common ground on which to meet, and in part to the fact that it gave them a common identity, as farmers, to celebrate. Yet its success also lay in its diversity of offerings and opportunities. Being a granger meant many different things to its members. For some, its attraction was the fraternal and ritual aspect—its secret rites and codes. For others, the attraction was more frankly financial: the Grange provided its members with economical fire insurance policies. For A. T. Clifford, the Grange was an agricultural muse, a call to new possibilities for the struggling New England farmer. For

another equally active granger, Ernest Additon, the organization was a political means, useful in bringing much needed things to the rural community. (One thing the Grange brought to the farmer was his mail: the idea of Rural Free Delivery originated in a grange meeting in the Midwest, and grangers lobbied long and hard for its realization, against much heavy urban opposition.) While Ernest made political use of the Grange organization, his wife Ocena, a former schoolteacher, saw the Grange as an educational institution. It was, in her words, "a way for people who didn't go to college to get a little more education, a broader view."

For women in particular, the Grange offered an unusual opportunity to get that broader view, and to be a public person. Other clubs and societies of the time severely limited the participation of women or excluded them altogether. A newspaper account of one moral reform club held in Leeds in the 1870s indicates that the public place allotted women, when one was allotted at all, was extremely marginal. Describing a spirited debate over the efficacy of capital punishment, the reporter noted that "stirring speeches were made by the men," followed that comment with a list of their names, and, as an afterthought, added "also some interesting remarks by the ladies." But the Grange broke with this tradition: it let women make "stirring speeches," too, and it gave them not just a voice but a vote. From its very inception, the fraternity granted women equal voting privileges and access to all public offices—offices which Leeds women eagerly entered. By the turn of the century, two of the three highest posts in Lodge #99 were filled by women and, in 1920, the year women finally got their own vote in American politics, a woman was elected to the highest office of all in the Grange of Leeds: that of Worthy Master. (Oddly enough, however, the Grange did not support the entrance of women into national politics: the national organization opposed female suffrage in 1920.)

Whatever the causes of its magnetism—and there were many—the Grange quickly gained a self-perpetuating monopoly on the social life of Leeds: the more people joined, the more people had to join. Russ Buckley, who spent every other Saturday from infancy to adulthood at the Grange hall, puts it bluntly. "The social order of the town was the Grange," he says. "You had to go; you had to find out what was going on." Another rule of small-town life undoubtedly also encouraged participation: if you did not go, you were the one who got talked about.

No one really had to go, of course, and many did not. Day laborers and mill workers could not easily afford membership dues or a Saturday off from wage work. For others, the obstacle was moral rather than monetary. Albert and Flora Bryant, adherents to the faith of the Second Advent Church, saw the Grange as a corrupting influence, promoter of the sinful practices of card playing and dancing. Not only did the Bryants avoid the organization: they shunned the very building itself—a stance which created some difficulty for their children, since the Grange housed most community activities, not just the sinful ones. When one son, Stanley Bryant, graduated from eighth grade, his parents forbade him to attend the graduation ceremonies being held, as usual, at the Grange. Instead, Stanley received his diploma in the mail—delivered by his own father, Albert, the mail carrier for North Leeds.

By refusing to step foot in the Grange, the Bryants placed themselves outside the larger circle of community life. And, as their granddaughter Anna Bryant Smith suggests, that choice of church over Grange probably reinforced itself. Albert had daily interaction with others as the North Leeds mail carrier. But Flora, like many Leeds women, had a more isolated world of work, tied to her hill-top farm by housechores and the care of five children. Albert had removed the telephone to prevent her from listening in—thus depriving Flora of one of the female social outlets of the time. “She was incredibly isolated,” reflects Anna. “She couldn’t push him to the Grange; she couldn’t push him to card parties. But she could push him to the all-day services and camp meetings. Church was her only contact.” In order to keep that contact up, Albert and Flora Bryant poured themselves socially, spiritually, and financially into the Second Advent Church of Livermore Falls. The two Bryant girls followed in the footsteps of their parents and made the church their world—but the boys chose different paths. One son, Arthur, embraced Grange life as passionately as his parents had shunned it: he served in the organization’s highest office of “Worthy Master” from 1928 to 1930.

While the conflict between church and Grange was a matter of moral conviction for the Bryants, other townspeople encountered and resolved that conflict on more practical grounds. Leeds’ churches found themselves competing with the Grange for the time and the tithes of the townspeople—and the Grange won out. While Grange dues poured in, church treasuries dried up. While Grange meetings overflowed on Saturdays, church pews sat empty on Sundays. Life’s weekly pattern did not necessarily change: for six days the townspeople worked, and on the seventh day they rested. But that seventh day, that day of rest and public ritual, was now Saturday instead of Sunday. So, too, the locus of community leadership had shifted, from the churches atop Chapel Hill to the Grange Hall at its foot. When listing positions of public trust in their biographies for the 1901 town history, Leeds’ most affluent and influential men seldom mentioned church offices. Grandfather might have been a minister, and Father a deacon: but the generation of 1901 boasted grangers, not church leaders.

The shift in allegiances did not go unnoticed. In his Centennial Celebration oration of 1901, Frank Herrick lamented the demise of public worship on Sundays, finding in it evidence of moral decline and faithlessness. He called for a return to public acts of piety, a return to the Leeds of long ago, when “every Sunday morning . . . families could be seen wending their way to church to listen to two long sermons.” Millet Howard, a younger contemporary of Herrick’s, describes the spiritual situation of early twentieth-century Leeds somewhat differently. Christianity had not left Leeds in those days, says Howard. It had simply moved out of the public sphere and into the privacy of a person’s home. “There were no, or only a few winter services,” he recalls, “but it was customary for the father, in most families, to gather his family around him and have either a family prayer session, read the Bible, or recite the twenty-third psalm.”

Whether or not Christian faith moved into the home, however, community hopes moved to the Grange. Frank Herrick, who listed himself as a Universalist in

the town history, might have called for a revival of church life in 1901 as a means of securing local morality; still, in the following years he took his community vision not to the nearly defunct Universalist Church but to the Grange, where he served as Worthy Master in 1902. Millet Howard might have been brought up with the Bible at home; but when he left home, he went straight to the Grange, where he, too, served as Worthy Master. In fact, Howard had that post when, in 1925, he and Herrick collided loudly over the propriety of letting young people hold unchaperoned parties at the Grange Hall. The two men disagreed about the way in which the Grange could best shape the values of Leeds' young people, but neither man doubted that the Grange could and should be doing just that. Like Leeds' churches in an earlier time, the Grange had become the place for public life, the place where Leeds people expressed their ties to one another in various ways—by competition in work, by cooperation in moments of need, and by conflict over moral issues of the day. In offering the town a cheering image of itself, the image of a community in which agriculture and culture alike might flourish, the Grange had become the eager custodian of Leeds' destiny. Of all the institutions on parade that August day in 1901, the Grange was the most popular party of hope—the vehicle in which the community moved most confidently toward its future.

STATE OF SIEGE: 1901-1950

The Leeds of 1901 had its parties of hope. And yet signs of decline, and attendant anxieties, also found their way into the determinedly optimistic air of the Centennial Celebration. There was, in truth, much to be anxious about. The "wonderful achievements" of technology touted by Seth Howard in his Centennial Celebration speech had forced Leeds to compete with the wider world for people and for markets—and the small town was losing the contest on both fronts.

Perhaps the most effective outlet for community anxiety was in the recurrent image of Leeds as a "hometown," a place where morality, if not money, was made. Leeds clearly could not compete with the West in the growing of grain or the grazing of cattle; it could not outdo larger towns and cities in salaries or style; but it seemed to have an edge on either place in the raising of children. Herrick gave the

"The image of Leeds as a hometown was popular among the people who had chosen to stay in Leeds, who could make sense of the abandoned farms around them by remembering that the abandoners had gone on to do marvelous things in the outside world. But it was popular with the people who had left Leeds, too, for it idealized their origins and yet justified their departure. The point of a "hometown," after all, was to send its children out into the world. Returning sons and daughters liked to compare themselves to the prodigal son of Luke 15, who had squandered his inheritance in the material world but had returned home to warmth, comfort, father's forgiveness and a feast of the fatted calf. (Fortunately for all would-be prodigal children, Luke says nothing about the son having to remain home after the feast.) Thus local historian J.C. Stinchfield used the prodigal son story to greet the Centennial Celebration crowd on behalf of all departed Leeds children. "As dutiful sons and daughters we come home to our honored and beloved, though broken, family circle," he began, and concluded by thanking the town (and, in his typically sentimental fashion, the river and hills and lake) for welcoming so warmly "the return of the sons and daughters for whom, like the prodigal son, the fattened calf has been led to the slaughter."

hometown image its classic expression in his Centennial Celebration Speech. "The West," he acknowledged, "excels us in the production of many things . . . corn and wheat, cattle and horses. But they never have nor ever will raise any better boys and girls or make any better citizens of them than we do here in Leeds."*

Another Centennial Celebration speaker who used the "hometown" image was General Oliver Otis Howard. The General had left Leeds when a young man to become a military hero in the Civil War; he had subsequently served as the disgraced first director of the nation's Freedman's Bureau and, much more to his personal credit, had founded Howard University, today the most eminent black college in America. "Leeds is still essentially a farming region," he told the crowd, "but for schools, churches, and home-voting it has ever been a fair type of free government and a fine place to start children in the race of life."

Howard's words betrayed his distance from the old hometown. Clearly, the seventy year-old General had not noticed, in the few hasty hours spent in Leeds before his speech, the disrepair of the town's churches. But his statement revealed a more dangerous blindness as well. It suggested that farming itself was somehow not part of the "race of life." By seeing Leeds and other New England farming towns as a moral rather than economic realm, untouched by commercial pursuits, hometown myth-makers like Howard overlooked the profoundly material aspects of life in rural America. Leeds remained, in 1901, "essentially a farming region"—but that did not exempt or exclude it from the "race of life" then raging in other regions of the United States. Farming was as much a business as any other, and as much as any other business it was being transformed by technology, innovation, and the all-American quest for material comfort.

In 1901, the transformation had only just begun. In the next fifty years, however, that transformation would be completed, and the conditions of life in Leeds transformed as well. The communal needs of Leeds' residents changed greatly in this time. And yet the local institutions established to meet these needs—the town government, the common schools, the Grange—did not change significantly in creed or conduct. Parties of hope in 1901, they gradually became parties of fear in the next half-century. They refused to respond to the changing needs of the community—not out of indifference, but in order to secure the town against decline. And yet, in the inevitable irony of the human story, they only contributed to that decline, because they sought Leeds' future in the ways of its past.



When Oliver Otis Howard spoke of "a fair type of free government" and "home-voting," he was praising the justice of the annual town-meeting method used in Leeds. New England town meetings have often been subject to praise. A study of local government in Maine conducted in the 1940s by members of the Federal Writers' Project described town meeting as perhaps the most "pure, or direct, form of democracy" practiced in America. Ideally, town meeting means

taxation with representation; it gives every taxpayer an opportunity to voice and vote his or her views on the uses of local tax money.

While ideals may be timeless, however, the conditions governing their realization change. The conditions which made town meeting a more or less effective "form of democracy" changed a great deal in twentieth-century Leeds; and the result was a political system which was less than pure, and less than democratic.

For instance, town meeting had been established on the assumption that Leeds' taxpayers were self-employed. The meeting, which ran all day on a Monday, had been scheduled to serve a community of independent farmers and merchants. Farmers and self-employed business people could simply close up shop for the day and make up the lost work time later in the week. As work ways changed with the advent of large-scale farming and manufacturing in the area, however, the effect of a Monday meeting was to exclude those who worked for others. Voters dependent on a daily wage from a local mill or dairy farm had to forgo that wage to spend the day at town meeting; in more extreme cases, they had to forgo their jobs, for employers were not always eager to give workers the day off, especially if the business itself was not in Leeds. The increasing number of residents who worked for others, and who held jobs outside of Leeds, thus found themselves effectively disenfranchised.

But those who worked in Leeds sometimes experienced disenfranchisement, too—of a more political sort. At town meeting, residents voted for officers and articles with a show of hands. What or whom one voted for was therefore public knowledge. The hand vote presumed great independence of thought on the part of voters, and in some ways it probably encouraged rather than dulled differences of opinion, for Leeds people consciously cultivated the quality of independence and enjoyed the opportunity to display it in a public debate. The hand vote also presumed that Leeds' voters were economically independent of one another—a natural enough assumption in the days when Leeds was a world of small family farms. With the commercialization of agriculture in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century, however, the pattern of small farms gave way to a feudal arrangement of sorts, with a few farmers owning the majority of the arable land in Leeds and renting it out to others or hiring them to till it. The capital accrued from commercial agriculture further allowed several of these farmers to become moneylenders to their neighbors. These changes naturally undermined the economic independence presupposed by a hand vote at town meeting. The man in the next row over might be one's landlord, employer, or creditor—and if he watched how you voted, you watched how you voted.

If, that is, you got to town meeting at all. Persons who were likely to vote in ways the town fathers did not like (for higher poor relief appropriations, say, or for educational improvements in certain areas of town) sometimes had trouble persuading their employers to let them leave work for the day. Charlie Barker, a descendent of several Leeds selectmen, offers one possible scenario: "Perhaps the

big farmers kept some of the poorer people from voting, saying, 'Well, gee whiz, you're going to have to stay home today, you can't go to town meeting. That's gotta be done, and if you want your job you're gonna be doing it.' The poorer people had the right to vote," concludes Charlie, "but not the right to leave their jobs."

Those who "owned" the town in the first half of the twentieth century were not, it should be noted, necessarily the same men who "ran" the town. Raleigh Knapp, who became selectman in 1928 and served for thirty-eight years, was not a large landowner, not even a farmer. The last representative of one of Leeds' founding families, Knapp had only an aristocratic character to match his lineage: he was known in the area as "the pipe-smoking gentleman of Leeds." Having inherited a name rather than estate (his family's homestead on River Road had, in fact, become the town poorhouse) he picked up a little cash here and there, tending booms on the Dead River for paper companies and serving as the low-paid president of that ill-fated cooperative, the Leeds Telephone Association.

While Raul Knapp was not a large landowner, however, he agreed closely with the politics of those who were. He was dedicated to keeping taxes down and the town out of debt, a philosophy that fitted perfectly with the interests of those who paid the most taxes and needed the least town assistance. Some say that he was "kept" in office by the large farmers in exchange for taking on the highly unpleasant presidency of the telephone association. Whether or not that is true, he remained in office all those years both at the behest of the large farmers and with the approval and admiration of many other townspeople. Had he encouraged town affairs in directions contrary to the interests of the large farmers, Knapp would not have lasted two terms. The fact that he stayed in office so very long suggests that he played well to the powers of the period, while certainly transcending them at times.

A low-tax philosophy had strong roots in the economic uncertainty of the time. Even the most prosperous farmers of early twentieth-century Leeds were pessimistic about their future prospects. Howard Lincoln, one of the town's most extensive corn growers and livestock dealers, told a Lewiston Daily Sun reporter during World War I that, if it were not for present high prices, he "would not have the courage to keep up the business." Lincoln was legendary for putting a spin on the facts: a local saying ran, "There's liars, there's damned liars—and then there's Howard Lincoln." But he was not lying that day. Leeds farmers knew that their prospects in the corn industry were limited, knowledge which certainly contributed to the low-tax temper of the town government. The large landowners needed their capital in order to keep up with technological improvements, and they wielded what clout they could to keep the town budget down—except where higher appropriations would improve their own business chances. Better roads were essential business improvements, and road appropriations accordingly took the largest percentage of the Leeds tax dollar from 1901 until 1930, when state and federal funds for road improvements relieved local towns of half that burden.

While roads received the highest percentage of the tax dollar in those years, poor relief received the lowest percentage, a division reflecting not actual need but the priorities of the powerful. The same agricultural conditions and trends which made a few people prosper made many more poor. In order to compete on the changing market, farmers had to keep up with changing methods of agriculture; those who lacked the capital to compete found themselves in a losing game in which the final cost was one's very land. If unable to pay taxes, they soon faced tax liens on their property. When the tax lien ran out the land became town property, to be sold as compensation for the unpaid taxes. The selectmen were, of course, the first to know about saleable land—and until the 1970s they were under no legal compunction to make the sale properly public. The land could thus be quietly bought up by the large farmers who were on friendly terms with the selectmen. Oftentimes the original owner became a tenant, renting his farm from a now even wealthier neighbor.

As farming grew more capital-intensive, poverty proved a permanent trap, not just a temporary misfortune, for many of Leeds' families. The poor stayed poor, or got poorer. They had neither the money to invest nor, if their taxes went unpaid, the land to pass on to their children; they often had many children; and those children seldom received an education that would raise them out of poverty. Long before welfare came along, poverty had become a self-perpetuating culture.

If they turned for help to local institutions, moreover, the poor of Leeds found themselves caught between a rock and a very hard place. They seldom had an advocate at the annual town meeting—or even a vote, for those who had been “pauperized” by receiving poor relief lost their voting rights. At the same time, the officials assigned to look out for their welfare, the overseers of the poor, were also the town selectmen, for whom the over-riding concern was a low budget. Finally, the real “powers,” the large farmers, were deeply unsympathetic to the plight of the poor, for reasons economic as well as moral. Day labor kept their farms operating; cheap day labor kept those farms profiting. Poor relief provided an alternative to the paltry wages offered by the large farmers: the less pleasant or easy that alternative, the cheaper for the town budget, and the cheaper for the large farmer's budget. The same local “Law of Lothrop” dictating a laborer's wages (“if you pay them more than a dollar today, they won't come back tomorrow”) had its corollary in poor relief appropriations: “If you let the town give them their dinner, they won't have to saw my wood for it.”

The selectmen had several ways of keeping poor relief costs low despite deepening need. One way was, quite simply, not to see that need. Another way was to discourage the needy from staying in Leeds. People in Leeds liked to say that people in Lewiston, the city just south of them, put their poor on the train with a one way ticket north, but Leeds had its northbound trains as well and a variety of tactics for getting people on them. One family recalls a visit from the town fathers, who presented a bill for the “public” education of their children and a very simple argument: If the family did not contribute to town tax revenues, they had no right

to use its public schools. The family in question disagreed with this reasoning and took Leeds to court. The town never showed for the hearing, the case was dropped, and the family stayed. For that one family that fought back, however, there must have been many others intimidated into leaving Leeds by such tactics.

In fact, the laws governing relief of out-of-town poor made such tactics risky. Maine towns remained responsible for support of residents who had moved elsewhere, as long as those residents received assistance within five years of having moved. The result, as Gib Buckley recalls, was something of a game for Maine's many struggling small towns. In order to keep new residents off their poor rolls, selectmen actively encouraged them to get poor relief within that five-year period; the former town then became responsible for paying it. Gib also remembers the selectmen of other towns paying visits to their poor in Leeds from time to time. Gib's father had hired an out-of-town pauper to do farm labor, and one day all three selectmen from the laborer's hometown showed up at the Buckleys' farm to have a little talk with their tax burden and encourage him to keep that job.

In the first half of the twentieth century, both the State and Federal government began showing up on Leeds' doorstep, with offerings of welfare aid in one hand and demands for matching funds in the other. Maine instituted Aid to Dependent Children, or, as it first appeared in the town records, "Mother's Aid," in 1917: the State was to provide half the funding and the town half, with the town retaining the right to determine true need. In the thirties the State began to provide direct economic aid to unemployed persons in Leeds; and in the same decade the Federal government established emergency relief and public works projects for the unemployed. Leeds' selectmen, however, were given responsibility for approving applicants for the extra-local aid and for the federally funded jobs. In later years, these programs would bypass local government altogether in their administration; for the first half of the twentieth century, however, they usually provided extra-local funds without removing control from local hands.

Care for the elderly poor became a particular problem for Leeds in these years. In the days of the small family farm, the child who inherited the farm often inherited, as well, the care of his or her parents. Unmarried daughters were also convenient caretakers, for, if a woman did not take on a second family, she usually stayed with her first. With offspring and other kin living at home or settled on their own farms nearby, the elderly were guaranteed care in their old age and death. The town, for its part, provided a public hearse at the end, a covered wagon kept in the shed behind the Baptist meeting house. Someone, usually the overseer of the town farm, received a few dollars from the grieving family (or, in the case of paupers, the begrudging government) to convey all of Leeds' dead to their final resting places. Death was indeed the great Democrat, then—for everyone who died took that ride. Still, the final destination was less than levelling. While those whose kinfolk could provide had family plots with tombstones carved for posterity, paupers went to a separate field to be buried in unmarked graves.

Those without family to care for them faced several alternatives. The selectmen traditionally let some of the indigent elderly keep their land, despite unpaid tax bills: the person could live out his or her life at home, and the land could be appropriated by the town afterward to compensate for unpaid taxes. If that person needed care, however, the choices were less dignified. Those who had no other options moved to the town farm, to rely upon a rapidly changing cast of overseers to escort them to death. For townspeople with savings, another alternative was to pay for care—but they did so in a world without health care professionals or nursing homes. Leeds legend has it that one woman gave her farm to an unrelated family, on the condition that they care for her until her death. The family agreed, but they tried to hurry things along a little: they placed a coffin by the woman's bedside in order to scare her to death. The story may have been embroidered by its tellers, but it suggests the very real fear of facing death without family, in a world where family, finally, was all.

As families began having fewer children toward the end of the nineteenth century, and as those children began leaving Leeds to live elsewhere, care for the elderly became a pressing problem for more than just the childless few. The town farm remained a last resort into the 1930s—but it was a solution that no one liked very much. The townspeople had never cared much for making capital investments in the town farm operations, and as farming became an increasingly capital-intensive proposition, the farm ceased to be profitable or even self-supporting. Leeds had trouble finding overseers to work an unprofitable farm, and so after 1911 it eliminated the office of overseer altogether and began renting the property out to families, with the stipulation that they care for an ever smaller number of inmates and an endless cycle of tramps. No one remembers, and town records do not reveal, just when the town farm stopped housing Leeds' poor altogether (the last mention made of inmates in town reports is 1925, after which the records only refer to the farm on occasion, as a source of revenue from rental or lumber sales). One thing was clear, however: the old ways of caring for elderly persons were no longer working. Again the State stepped in, with its Old Age Assistance Act of 1938. The National Social Security Act of 1935 provided a long-term response and has, in time, made a marked difference in the security of Leeds residents after retirement.

In care for the elderly, as in care for the poor, then, the first half of the twentieth century saw changes in the causes and consequences of human need in Leeds. And, slowly, but very slowly, new ways of meeting new needs emerged, with much of the impetus coming from the State and Federal government. But the town fathers, those who held the reins of local economic and political power firmly in hand, turned a blind eye to the depth of poverty in Leeds and continued to assess both need and its remedies with standards taken from a world of small family farms.

Looking back on that period, some idealize the town fathers; others indict them for their behavior. Either they were trying to save the town—or they were

trying to feather their own nests. Either they were upright and moral, able to judge and punish wrongdoing in ways bureaucracy cannot—or they were downright mean and enjoyed humiliating others.

There is something about life in an intimate community like Leeds that, even today, encourages black-and-white judgements of others. Perhaps because interrelationships are in fact so very complex, it is somehow easier to simplify it all by seeing only saints or monsters. But the town fathers of earlier twentieth-century Leeds, the men governing the town between 1900 and 1950, were neither monstrous nor particularly saintly. They were living through a time of great economic insecurity and rapid change in the lives of Leeds people. A deep fear of the changes taking place, and a lack of moral imagination, led them to treat new problems with old answers. While trying to understand the reasons for their ways, however, we must not overlook the effect they had on other human lives. Their blindness often issued forth in injustice, and in their injustice there was sometimes a startling cruelty.



The educational system with which Leeds entered the twentieth century — those eight wagon loads of white-clad schoolchildren at the head of the Centennial Celebration Parade—changed little on the surface before 1950. Beneath that still surface, however, the same tugs and pulls at work in poor relief could be seen. The educational needs of Leeds people were being transformed by changes in the kinds of work available to them; yet the school system at their disposal remained very much a public institution created by and for a community of small family farms. The State, struggling to accommodate these changes, increasingly entered into the administration of the local schools, offering funding and on occasion demanding legislated improvements. But the final application of those funds and the implementation of all major educational reforms remained in community hands, to be decided at the annual town meeting. And the decisions made at town meeting were profoundly shaped both by the economic anxiety of the time and the educational philosophy of the controlling block of town fathers.

The eight carriages of children, their white clothes implying innocence, purity, and cleanliness, spoke eloquently of Leeds' best vision of its school system in 1901. But other contemporary images of the schools suggested a much more troubled reality. With the unimpeded decline in population, classes were shrinking. Several schoolhouses had closed down altogether, the town paying for the conveyance of inconvenienced students to districts far from their farms. General O. O. Howard, listing his "few sources of regret" about Leeds at the Centennial Celebration, singled out the sad sight of its schools growing smaller; in the Leeds town history published that year, the biographer of the Howard family spoke more vividly of "houses of education going down in decay." Both the General and his family's biographer saw population decline as the problem and repopulation as the obvious

solution. Howard vested his hopes in the possibility that visits home would "draw many families back to the old homestead" to stay, while the biographer called for a return to the reproductive "prolificness" of old. "Let us hope that in coming years, the example of our early parents may be closely imitated in this direction," he urged, "and our sparsely settled districts again sound with the merry chatter and songs of the little ones as they go to and come from the newly dressed houses of education On this, the life of the town,—yea, the life and prosperity of the nation depends."

That heartfelt plea for "prolificness" went unheeded, however, in the decades after 1901. The town's population continued to decline, and with it went school registration. In 1907, Leeds had 200 pupils in its schools; by 1932, registration had dipped to 121. But larger classes would hardly have cured what ailed Leeds' schools: indeed, they might only have exacerbated the problem. For what the town so dearly needed was not scholars but dollars—dollars with which it could consolidate several of the smaller school districts, repair the deteriorating structures of the buildings and pay teachers to work in them.

The district school system had originally left building maintenance and teacher hiring and pay to the members of each of the town's nine or more districts. Taxpayers appropriated a lump sum at annual meeting, which was divided among the districts. Residents then met by district to bid for the jobs of janitor and wood supplier, to solicit volunteer labor for repairs, and to bid out the board of the teacher. This arrangement insured the best and the worst results of local management: it encouraged volunteerism and the participation of residents in the life of their own institutions, but it also encouraged short-term thinking ruled by one's wallet. As a result the school buildings suffered, especially in poorer areas of town. When in 1893 the State, in an effort to equalize educational opportunities, replaced the district system with a single town supervisor and assistant committee, Leeds' schoolhouses were in near fatal condition. Nor were there funds available to rescue them. State law required Leeds to raise so many pennies per capita for its common school appropriation (the amount was eighty cents in 1901); the fewer heads, the lower the mandated appropriation—and Leeds people were never inclined to raise more than was absolutely necessary, especially in time of economic trouble.

The first decades of the twentieth century were difficult, indeed, for Leeds schools, as superintendents tried to stretch a shrinking budget across expanding costs. Teachers' salaries suffered most. The town increased its teaching wage regularly between 1910 and 1920, a decade of relative prosperity for rural America, thanks to war prices; still, its average wage in 1920 fell far beneath the state average, which was in turn well below the national average. In 1919, for instance, Maine teachers averaged an annual salary of \$462.46. Leeds teachers struggled along with a paltry \$ 339.32. By 1925, Leeds' wages had nearly doubled—up to \$621.52. Even then, though, Leeds teachers were receiving nearly twenty-five percent less than the average Maine teacher. As a result, the town did not easily attract trained teachers. Instead, it had to make do with local teachers of varied

training, women who were, as the 1926 town report put it, "willing to sacrifice salary for the privilege of being at home." A succession of local school superintendents tried to see the bright side of the situation, noting in their annual reports that the populace was "fortunate to have so many good local teachers willing to serve their home town at a reasonable wage." A common rationalization for underpaying teachers, one still heard today, was that "low wages make dedicated teachers—since you can't be in it for the money." A more likely approximation of the truth is that low wages did not keep dedicated teachers out of the profession altogether, since women like Eula Carville and Emma Barker taught in Leeds schools for decades and did it well, earning not money but the respect of several Leeds generations and a reputation for a firm hand. But there is no evidence that low wages in themselves "made" teachers dedicated. Many of Leeds' teachers entered the schoolhouse with no teaching experience at all and did not stay long enough to earn the epithet "dedicated."

Nor could the town, try as it might, avoid forever the need for sound walls and working stoves to protect students against the winter winds. Leeds' school superintendents used most of the space allotted them in the town's annual report to stress the "deplorable" condition of the schoolhouses and plead for more money. The state health inspector sometimes went further than pleading and ordered the town to shut down schoolhouses until crucial repairs had been made, declaring them a health hazard to occupants.

Deteriorating buildings, substandard wages, and transient untrained teachers: all these problems had plagued Leeds schools in the first century of town life. But, as we have seen, the educational system of the nineteenth century had modest and mostly moral goals—mainly, to prepare children for citizenship—which were not necessarily impeded by inexperienced teachers or poor facilities. In the early decades of the twentieth century, however, the function of formal education in America began to change. Once a program for building moral character, schooling now became increasingly important in determining the economic opportunities of the child and, indirectly, the community. In cities, especially, education had become a sorting-out device, sorting children into future occupations and income brackets. Reformers responded with programs for secondary education, graded schools, and teacher certification—first introduced into the fast-growing urban areas, but soon reaching beyond into rural areas as well. Across the nation, educational expectations had begun to change, and Leeds' own schooling conditions acquired a new, more disturbing significance as a result.

Local movements for educational reform began not in Leeds but beyond its borders, in the agencies and legislature of the State, which in the latter half of the nineteenth century began to take a keen interest in state-wide conditions of education. This interest manifested itself first in efforts to provide secondary educational opportunities for all Maine's children. In 1873, the State began offering each township matching funds for a "free" (eg, tuitionless) high school; Leeds took advan-

tage of the offer to provide secondary school education for the first time. With only one brief hiatus, a free high school was held in town for the next thirty-three years—until 1906, when the State decided instead to provide partial tuition for students to attend private academies in neighboring towns.

But Leeds, now grown accustomed to having its own high school, did not tolerate this arrangement long. In 1918, West Leeds bachelor farmer Volney Deane died and left the town money to establish a public high school in his old neighborhood. When the V.A. Deane High School opened several years later, it occupied half of the one-room West Leeds schoolhouse (first through eighth grade continued to meet in the other half) and offered a two-year program variously composed of English, Latin, and French, business arithmetic, ancient and medieval history, community civics, biology, and general science. In 1928, a "General Course" was added, with an emphasis on agricultural skills. According to instructor Edith Chase, it included "arithmetic which deals with the practical everyday problems of the farmer. . . , farm bookkeeping for the boys . . . and sewing for the girls." Taxpayers at town meeting greeted their new high school by begrudgingly voting a little money for repairs. A voluntary association of citizens showed more enthusiasm: they raised funds and supplies for the new school, including a sewing machine for the "General Course" in 1928.

The V.A. Deane High School hardly revolutionized the educational opportunities of Leeds' teenagers. The children of Leeds' wealthier or more ambitious families continued to go straight to the nearby private academies of Kent's Hill or Leavitt after eighth grade; less privileged persons, if they completed eighth grade at all, often stopped formal education there and went straight to work. In fact, secondary schooling remained the exception rather than the rule through the first half of the twentieth century in Leeds. A study of Androscoggin County in 1964 found that only thirty-eight percent of its rural residents over the age of twenty-five had completed high school; less than five percent of that age group had completed college.

Yet an increased interest in secondary education, however slow to grow, was still noticeable in twentieth-century Leeds—an interest that had been fostered, if not entirely fueled, by state concerns about raising the educational levels of Maine residents. In 1918, the state legislature took yet another step which would profoundly affect the nature of schooling in twentieth century Leeds: it mandated the formation of a single "school union" by Leeds and the neighboring towns of Turner and Greene. The new union brought the schools of all three towns under a single administration, which meant a loss of much symbolic and even some real autonomy for Leeds. More significantly, however, the new administration was to be headed by a "professional educator." Until that time, Leeds had elected a superintendent and supervisory committee at town meeting, choosing from among local residents and using local standards. These local superintendents seldom studied up on current educational theories or methods: they had their hands full just find-

ing teachers to work at the wages the taxpayers provided and keeping the school buildings from falling down around their pupils' ears. In short, they were members of the Leeds' community, not of a profession—and their policies and pursuits reflected that allegiance.

With the formation of a school union in 1918 and the arrival of a professional educator to supervise it, however, allegiances shifted sharply. The new superintendents were not native to Leeds, Greene or Turner: they represented a profession, and they brought to town a new vision of "the school," a new set of standards according to which that school should be built, and a new set of resources with which to begin building.

The new superintendents did not disregard the issues which had preoccupied their local predecessors; they remained concerned with concrete problems like building maintenance and student absenteeism. But they prefaced their assessments of local school needs in the annual reports with lengthy philosophical treatises on the True Nature of Education, often studded with quotes from state officials. Thus Raymond Blaisdell, the school union superintendent of 1921, introduced his essay in the annual report with the words of his state superintendent: "Neglect a child and a faulty stone is built into the foundations of our republic, neglect a community and a bog of mire is tolerated in the thoroughfare of human progress." Blaisdell proceeded to chide Leeds for being one such bog of mire (not a pitch likely to put the superintendent in good favor with the townspeople) and called for a plan of improvements which "would raise our school system to a high degree of efficiency."

"Efficiency" was a key word for the superintendents of these years. Education was a business like any other, and the superintendents saw themselves as professional businessmen, seeking maximum results for the capital invested. Thus wrote Blaisdell in 1922: "School administrators should concentrate their efforts to increase efficiency through improved teacher service and to realize full value for every dollar expenditure." And C. Owen Greene, who followed Blaisdell into office, noted that "the business of managing a system of public schools is not unlike other businesses" and urged local cooperation to attain "the maximum of desired results."

The vision of a school system as a business which should produce maximum results was not necessarily new, although the language expressing it differed somewhat from that of previous local superintendents. But the standards by which the new administrators measured results were new—for they were taken from state and professional guidelines, not from the Leeds community itself. According to these guidelines, education could and should meet the same standards from Leeds to Los Angeles. The town's new school superintendents sought to bring the rural school up to the standards of the urban school, and they minced no words in saying so. "The progress of the city school has been marked, the development of the efficiently graded village school is commendable," wrote Superintendent Blaisdell

in 1921, "but the advancement of the one-room school has been inexpressibly slow. The American principle of a square deal for all demands better educational opportunities for the rural boy and girl." Standardized education, as the new superintendents saw it, and as social changes increasingly made it, was not simply a privilege but an economic right and a necessity. Whereas Oliver Otis Howard and others had once argued that demographic decline had caused the town's educational problems, the new superintendents argued the reverse: the town's educational problems had caused demographic decline. In his third annual report, Superintendent Isaiah Hodges remarked, "As I drive through the country and find the deserted farms with their buildings tumbling to decay, I often wonder if one of the reasons for this is not the fact that the opportunities for an education have been denied or made difficult for the children of these farm homes." In their quest for standardization, the superintendents had some assistance from the State, which, in 1920, placed a "State Course of Study" in every school and required that scholars be fitted into grades according to state-supplied standards.

The new administrators were part of a profession first and part of the community second—if at all. Likewise, they perceived Leeds' teachers to be part of a profession and expected performances in keeping with the standards of that profession. Annual reports encouraged each teacher to "keep abreast of modern methods"—which meant reading professional journals, attending teachers' meetings and conventions whenever possible, visiting other schools, and so forth. The superintendents also had some freedom to enforce their expectations: unlike their local predecessors, they were not related to half the teachers on their payrolls and could press for the hiring of state-accredited teachers. Isaiah Hodges, who served as superintendent of the tri-town school union from 1926 until 1964, focused much of his early energy on teacher certification. When Hodges took the position in 1926, not one of Leeds' teachers was a Normal School Graduate; by 1933, every teacher had that training and certification. (Hodges' success was brief-lived, however. As soon as the Great Depression of the thirties gave way to the job boom of World War II, certified teachers demanded better wages; Leeds, unwilling to pay those wages, returned to a variably trained teaching staff.)

Certification of teachers was one of Superintendent Hodges' passions; the consolidation of Leeds' many one-room schools was another. In the early thirties, he began lobbying in his annual report for one centrally located school building in place of a dozen disparately equipped schoolhouses scattered through town. His battle was to be a long one, for Leeds lacked the economic optimism to make so expensive a move. Hodges did not stop trying, though—and he used every available shred of evidence and local emotion to help his argument. He printed up "birth control charts" (which were in fact birthrate charts) to prove that Leeds had an exponentially expanding school-aged population; he printed school enrollment charts, to prove that a greater percentage of these children were attending elementary and high school. He even used World War II to the best of his ability, suggesting in his 1945 annual report that a centralized school built now could be dedicated to the war veterans.

Another growing concern in the field of education in the early twentieth century was health and hygiene. As education took on the function of a social sorting-out device, educators became increasingly concerned about the arbitrary effects of poor health, hunger and physical impairment on school performance. In 1919, the State passed a Physical Education Act mandating the hiring of a physical education instructor, with the bill to be divided between town and State. Leeds complied with a two-hundred dollar appropriation for a "Physical Culture Fund" and, in 1921, school administrators launched their own "Health Crusade," hoping to inspire the ardor of "the crusades of the middle ages." In return for brushing their teeth twice daily and washing their hands before meals, children received a certificate and some emblems signifying "promotion to faithful service." That same year, two schoolhouses began serving hot lunches during winter term, and in 1922 two more schools joined the lunchline. None of these four, however, were situated in the deeply impoverished area of South Leeds. Not until the 1950s and the construction of a single centralized school did hot lunches become a permanent feature of every child's school day.

In 1925 school administrators left their Health Crusade behind and took a more daring step in the field of health reform. They used the seventy-five dollars appropriated for "Physical Culture" to hire Dr. D.F.D. Russell for the first health examination of school children in Leeds' history. The results were depressing, indeed. "Numerous defects of tonsils, teeth, vision, adenoids, nutrition, hearing and glands were found," reported superintendent Greene. But parental response to the doctor's findings was even more depressing: less than twenty-five percent of the detected problems received medical attention. In the years of the Great Depression, the Red Cross added its funds and influence to the effort; beginning in 1932 and occasionally in the years thereafter, a public health nurse came to town to perform check-ups in each of the schools. The Red Cross nurses were generously assisted by Doc Russell and Leeds nurse Myrtis Pillsbury. Teachers, superintendents, the town PTA and selectmen also applied pressure, sending notices to parents and even calling upon them at home. Despite their efforts, however, the number of detected problems increased from year to year while the number of corrective treatments remained low. Of 54 children found needing dental care in 1936, only 10 had made it to a dentist a year later; of 126 children found needing dental care in 1939, only 16 had seen a dentist a year later. The Red Cross report of 1939 noted that a little less than seven percent of Leeds' schoolchildren met the standard requirements for vision, hearing, teeth, throat, posture and weight.

Hopes for better health care at home finally gave way to an emphasis on preventative health care within the school system. By the late '40s, the Red Cross was holding three or four health clinics annually, during which vaccines against diphtheria, tetanus and small pox were administered. After building a central school in the fifties, Leeds administrators also launched a hot lunch program. Both the health clinics and hot lunch program received extra-local funding to make them go: the State contributed three thousand annually to the hot lunches; and the Red Cross put on three or four clinics a year, with only fifty dollars in aid from Leeds.

While the State provided funds and legislators applied pressure, concerned townspeople formed voluntary associations which added their own ideas and concerns to the stream of educational changes. A variety of groups appeared in Leeds at the turn of the century, each asserting, in very different ways, a keen interest in the condition of Leeds education. Two secret societies—the Junior Order of United American Mechanics and its sister organization, the Daughters of Liberty—focused on Leeds' common schools as cradles of American values. Specifically, they pledged to protect the schools against "foreign" (eg., Roman Catholic) influence and to uphold the reading of the Bible in them. Beyond their provocative platform statements, however, there is no surviving evidence that these groups did anything to affect the course of local education.

A far more enduring and influential set of voluntary associations were parent and teacher clubs, which first emerged at the turn of the century. These clubs developed around two new and popular convictions: first, that education was a crucial foundationstone of the community; and second, that the child was a creature of curious and special needs which the community, not just the family, should strive to meet. In 1900, long before superintendents began exhorting them to act "professional," Leeds' teachers formed an educational club which met regularly to share professional papers and, on occasion, invited visiting speakers to lecture on new teaching methods, the psychology of the child, physical culture, and so on. Parents organized a variety of clubs as well. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, parents from several Leeds schools ran a School Improvement League, which raised funds for plant improvements; their achievements included drinking fountains and clocks for the classrooms, new paper for school walls, and a travelling library. Finally, in 1915, parents and teachers came together in a single Parent-Teachers Association which proposed to study "the welfare of the child in home, school, and community and to promote better understanding between parents and teachers." In the first decades of its existence, the PTA was a crucial public arena for Leeds residents to air their concerns and share their dreams about Leeds schools. Along with lists of members in attendance and details of the dishes consumed, for instance, the minutes from one PTA meeting of 1917 recorded that Mrs. Lucy Herrick, the wife of former superintendent Frank Herrick, told of "a beautiful dream in which she saw a high school in Leeds," a dream which came true several years later with the opening of the V.A. Deane High School in West Leeds.

Voluntary associations like the PTA brought local parents and teachers together to imagine new ways of educating Leeds children. In order to realize the dreams of a Lucy Herrick or Isaiah Hodges, however, the townspeople had to agree to pay certain costs: the concrete cost of constructing a new building or paying better teaching wages, as well as the less calculable cost of change itself, of risking past ways for future possibilities. Taxpayers doled out fifteen dollars for new flags one year, and fifty dollars for physical culture programs the next; but they consistently balked at the prospect of more daring and costly reforms. Economics were one obstacle; politics a formidable foe as well. The power block of large landown-

ers was not especially disposed to support major educational projects: even a minor and much-needed improvement like lights in the schoolhouses aroused fierce opposition from them. As the town's biggest taxpayers, they would bear the brunt of the cost; and they were least likely to benefit directly, since they had the capital to send their children to private academies or, quite often, were bachelor farmers with no children at all. But community opinion was not simply divided along income lines. Rich, poor and the many in between shared a resistance to change and a suspicion of education that aroused opposition. The old New England prejudice against booklearning farmers, and the concomitant conviction that "what was good enough for father is good enough for me and that means it will be good enough for my children," tended to discourage educational expansion and innovation.

The result was an ongoing battle between the superintendents and taxpayers at town meeting. Year after year, the superintendent and supervisory committee proposed innovations, revealed new state regulations, and requested higher appropriations. And, year after year, they faced a town unwilling, or unable, to fund the things they wanted. In education, as in poor relief, Leeds had entered a state of siege.



The struggles of Leeds' schools and town government in the first half of the twentieth century are signs of the quiet crisis in which this community found itself. On the one hand, changes wrought in the economy and social structure meant changes in the basic needs of Leeds people. On the other hand, uncertainty about the future and an erosion of the political and economic independence of many citizens prevented the town's formal caretakers of need—its own public institutions—from responding readily to those changes. The State and Federal government intervened with funds, regulations, and experts from time to time. Often the town had no choice but to accept that intervention, as in the case of the formation of a school union and the arrival of a professional administrator to oversee Leeds' schools. While outside experts and money could change ways of doing in the town, however, they could not change ways of seeing. They could not change the community's vision of itself, a vision taken from a time of small family farms, a vision no longer adequate to Leeds' changing reality.

In order for new ways of seeing to emerge, a compelling new creed had to come from within the community. This has been an axiom of Leeds' history. The vision of a New Jerusalem only took hold in the settlement era when its gospel was given to the people by fellow settler Thomas Francis—a man who was not even an ordained minister! A century later, the Grange vision of a prosperous and enlightened farm village also took hold in Leeds, but only when a resident believer began to preach that gospel. Leeds has always heard the voices of its own better than the voices of those beyond its borders; and in the insecure years of the early twentieth century, it was less inclined to hear outsiders than ever. If new ideas were to

flourish within the community, however, they needed a seedbed of sorts, a public place, to grow.

The Grange, as we have seen, had provided Leeds with new public visions: at the turn of the century, it had been very much the party of hope for the town, the party invested in Leeds' future as an agricultural community. In the next few decades it remained the central meeting place for public life and the arena for community projects and programs. Yet it gradually ceased to draw townspeople together, or to serve as a seedbed for new ideas.

Just as the Patrons of Husbandry had excited people for many reasons, so it ceased to inspire for many different reasons. Not least of these, however, was the trend away from farming toward other kinds of work. Grange programs had focused on the interests of the farmer; Grange meetings had suited the schedule of farmers. As many people left farming for wage work in nearby cities and mill towns, the agricultural events offered by the Grange lost their attraction. The town fair, which had brought Leeds people together on the common ground of work, lost that ground and with it many fair-goers. The fair continued to be held until the mid '50s, but as early as '41 a local journalist observed that the crowd was smaller than the year before. (That same year, however, dinner was served to more people than ever. While Leeds may have lost interest in agricultural exhibitions, it has never lost its appetite; to this day, public suppers are the most popular events of community life.) For those who continued to farm for a living, the Farm Bureau gradually took over many of the functions once filled by the Grange: fire insurance, professional expertise and advice.

The Grange had drawn people in not only for farming and food, but for amusement as well. In the twenties and thirties, however, it found itself in stiff competition with other forms of recreation. The advent of cars and tarred roads enabled townspeople to drive into the city for a Saturday evening's entertainment, instead of staying in the same old town and seeing the same old faces. Moreover, with the appearance of radios in the parlors of town, beginning in the twenties, and the addition of televisions in the fifties, people didn't have to go anywhere at all: they could get their amusement by staying at home.

In order to stem the receding tide of members, the Grange drifted away from educational and agricultural activities and toward more generally social ones—but this only lost the interest of its ardent farming faction without edging out other forms of entertainment. As a social club, the Grange still attracted a small and devoted segment of the populace: the town fathers, large farmers, merchants and their families. For this small but powerful minority it continued to offer a comforting vision of life in Leeds and to contain within its Lodge walls a world of sufficient social and political intrigue. For those without a stake in that world or faith in that vision, however, the Lodge looked much less attractive. Young people of Leeds in the thirties and forties, especially, felt that it no longer offered a compelling vision or set of values. As one child of the time recalls, she dutifully attended the meet-

ings with her parents, but the rituals and incantations seemed so many "manners without meaning" and left her with the sour taste of hypocrisy in her mouth. Her memories of the Grange echo another townspeople's memories of his parents' church in an earlier era; and indeed, the churches and Grange of Leeds suffered parallel fates. Both became, in their own time, institutions of "manners without meaning," leaving the new generation to look elsewhere for new values and visions.

Those who looked to church life in the twenties and thirties found little there of public inspiration. One local congregation after another had died quietly in the shadow of the Grange. The Baptist church held out the longest, thanks to the faithful service of its pastor, William Russell Pettengill (1847-1937). Pettengill is remembered as a mild man who cried copiously when he preached. Under his tearful guidance, the First Baptist Church continued haltingly along, offering year-round services in intermittent years until 1924, when Pettengill, then in his late seventies, settled for summer preaching only. After his death in 1937, the Baptists and Universalists decided to overlook their century-long feud and began to take turns providing preachers for a summer congregation: one summer the Baptists would provide, the next summer the Universalists. The ministers hired were of any denominational stripe. "Denomination just wasn't all that important," as Edna Waite Whetzel politely puts it. "What mattered was going to Sunday School and church."

William Russell Pettengill had not been the fire-and-brimstone variety of Baptist, but his children were another breed. One son, William Tillotson "Till" Pettengill, who had left Leeds to become minister of a Metropolitan Wesleyan church in Wisconsin, returned home in the 1930s to hold a series of camp meetings at the Baptist Church. His sister Ruth not only became a minister but married one as well, and that preaching couple also came back to Leeds from time to time to evangelize from local pulpits. Edna Whetzel used to go to the camp meetings and, as she recalls, "there was a lot of hollering and sometimes we'd get on the laughing side of it and sometimes on the scary side of it." Whether amused or afraid, Edna was not inclined to join; and when at one such meeting the minister said he'd rather see his daughter dead than on a dance floor, Edna did not approve of his choice and stopped going altogether. Cad Morris tells a similar story of a camp meeting held at the Brick Schoolhouse on the Bernie Hartford Road in Leeds. There the preacher told his listeners what a wicked man his own grandfather had been. "He never went to heaven!" yelled the preacher. "He surely went to hell!" Upon hearing this, one fellow got up and headed for the door. "There goes another man to hell!" said the preacher. The damned man turned around and inquired, "Want me to give your regards to your grandfather?"

Whether such things actually happened or not, stories like these were popular around town; and their popularity indicates a tension felt by Leeds people between their own priorities and those of the camp meeting ministers. The evangelists

harshly challenged local values with their own, stressing the bond between the individual and God over the ties of family or community. While they alienated some, however, they also attracted many others. In fact, the camp meetings had so many followers that, in the thirties, Till Pettengill organized a branch of the Metropolitan Wesleyan Church in Leeds. The new church eventually occupied the once multi-denominational Union Church at Keen's Corner in Leeds, where it continued as an active congregation until the late 1960s.

Like the Nazarene congregation which later succeeded it at Keen's Corner, the Metropolitan Wesleyan Church demanded a personal rejection of modern living with all its corrupting pleasures, from the traditional temptations of dancing and "speculation" (gambling) to the devil's newer devices—radio, television and the moving picture. A tract belonging to one family who held camp meetings in their home warned sinners of the war between God and modernity. "Instead of reading God's word today, you have been reading 'the funnies,'" it charged. "On the screen the enemy puts the sordid rot of the world. He clutters our highways with all the questionable and obscene advertisements of things which can only damn the soul . . ." Such simple condemnations of the tempting and intangible modern world had an understandable appeal.

Yet the appeal was addressed to individuals. These judgements did not encourage a community vision, did not offer a new vision of Leeds to its residents. Sitting on the border between Greene, Leeds and Wales, the various evangelical congregations occupying old Union Church were never community associations: their members came from the region rather than from a single town, and their ministers were highly transient evangelists, seldom staying with the congregation longer than five years. Aside from occasional suppers to raise funds for mission work, these congregations did not sponsor public events—and the mission work for which they raised funds was set in foreign lands, not in Leeds or surrounding towns. These were the only churches to emerge and prosper in the depressed decade of the 1930s; significantly, they were churches which offered no new grounds for community life in Leeds, but rather a ground for life apart from Leeds and the rest of the modern material world.

Despite their failure as places of worship, the Mainstream Protestant churches of Leeds did spawn one new social organization in the early twentieth century. In 1914, a group of women formed the Ladies' Circle of the Universalist Church, dedicated to "the financial betterment" of that church and to the "improvement of the moral and social conditions of the community." By sewing together, selling their creations, and collecting meeting dues, the Circle members contributed to the upkeep of the church building for the next four decades and, with a little help from the collection plate, paid the minister's wages on "Universalist" summers. Sometimes they directly provided goods to a person of need in town. Records include sewing done for "a busy mother with many children," burned-out families, or a Circle member who had herself fallen ill or into poverty. They also made regular donations to a variety of charities and community services, from national organiza-

tions like the Red Cross to local efforts at disease inoculation. And, in a small way, they provided some public life for the townspeople, through evening entertainments and suppers and handiwork sales.

The Circle's greatest success, however, was as a provider of community for its own members. Bi-weekly meetings gave the women an opportunity to escape an empty house and see other people while putting their hands to productive use. For many of the members, elderly and alone, the Circle became a second family of sorts, keeping watch over them and caring for them long after they could no longer attend the sessions. But it was a family limited to a certain segment of the Leeds community, for the daylong meetings accommodated only those women who could afford to do volunteer instead of wage labor, who had no young children, or who could pay a sitter while they went to meetings. While providing an important community within Leeds, then, it did not become a ground for the meeting of disparate groups within the town. The hundred names which appeared on its membership rolls in the course of forty years were largely identical to those appearing on the rolls of the Grange and rosters of town government.

Secret societies also contributed their own visions to community life in the first half of the twentieth century. Such societies had been an important presence in Leeds since its earliest years—so important that they received a chapter unto themselves in the 1901 history. Perhaps the best known and longest lasting of secret societies, the Masons, has always had a strong local following, although Leeds itself never hosted a lodge. To this day, the Masonic lodges of surrounding towns continue to be profoundly important in the lives of many Leeds men and women. But the Masonic Order has never been a place for Leeds community life: instead, it has tended to be a competing community, its allegiances perceived at times as mutually exclusive of other local ties. (One nineteenth-century Mason and Leeds minister, Reverend Foss, anticipating a request from his Baptist congregation to choose between his lodge and his church, announced from the pulpit that he would choose the Masons any day. This so shocked and hushed his parishioners that he never heard word of it again.)

The other secret societies of nineteenth-century Leeds had mainly been temperance leagues or, in the case of a few very secret societies, intemperance leagues. By the turn of the century, however, the hot topic was not alcohol but economic security. Three societies founded between 1899 and 1901 sought in different ways to secure the future for local workers. The Ancient Order of United Workmen had all the secret society trappings of passwords and private rituals, but was essentially an insurance society for men: it paid insurance to the widows and orphans of its members in the days before Social Security, pensions or life insurance met the needs of later age. Open to "white" mechanics and others, its principal constituents in Leeds were part-time farmers, mill workers and self-employed laborers. Another all-male organization, the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, sought a different kind of protection for its members—protection against immi-

grant competition through the promotion of "American" (eg., Protestant) values in local schools and organized hostility toward "sectarian" (eg., Catholic) influence. While mainly a society founded on fear, it, too, offered a sick and funeral fund to members, who tended to be farmers, mill workers and merchants of slightly less successful ilk than those in the United Workmen. The Mechanics' sister society, Daughters of Liberty, was founded a year later with a platform focusing exclusively on the promotion of Protestant values: the Daughters dedicated themselves to protection of the public schools from Catholic influence, teaching of the Bible and observance of the Sabbath.

The Mechanics and the Daughters of Liberty tried to provide a scapegoat, in the form of the Catholic immigrant, for the social and economic anxieties of Leeds residents. Unlike the nearby mill towns of Lewiston and Livermore Falls, however, Leeds had no substantial immigrant population, French-Catholic or otherwise, on which it could blame its woes. And in fact there is no evidence that these societies had much of a life in Leeds: after the record of their birth in the 1901 history, they never resurface in town memories. Most likely what little real attraction they possessed faded with the establishment of other sources of home and life insurance. In the 1920s a more famous nativist organization, the Ku Klux Klan, also attempted to play on local fears with its call for the salvation of Protestant America from other races and creeds. It had an active branch in Livermore Falls and several Leeds enthusiasts—including a former superintendent of schools and a long-serving selectman—but these few were never able to get a branch going in Leeds itself. The only lasting legacy of the KKK in Leeds was a schoolyard song:

The night was dark and dreary
The air was full of sleet
When Pa he joined the Ku Klux Klan
And Took Ma's last clean sheet.

The anti-immigrant organizations that reared their ugly heads, however briefly, on the landscape of Leeds were extreme expressions of a deep-running insecurity. Less extreme expressions, but perhaps more pervasive and profound, could be found in other parts of public life in Leeds: in the decline of the Grange, in the desertion of community churches, in the rise of evangelical creeds offering a set of values severely at odds with local ways of life.

But most of all, this uncertainty evinced itself in the rigid posture of Leeds' governing institutions at a time of profound change in the lives and needs of residents. The parade of institutions and local leaders with which the town entered the twentieth century changed little in the course of fifty years. It arrived at mid-century with the same one-room schoolhouses, the same all-controlling power block of town fathers and large landowners, the same social monopoly, however weakened, of the Grange. And yet the landscape through which that parade had moved had changed greatly in the intervening years. Gone was the isolation which had made Leeds a world unto itself; gone, the homogeneity of work and lifestyle

which had made it a world of shared experiences, needs, opportunities and creeds. Gone was the real self-sufficiency of the family farm which had once made Leeds a community of relative liberty and justice for all. The outer world had entered into ever greater contact with the town in a myriad of ways—as an economic competitor, as an meddling state government, as a culture of temptation and intangibility—and in each of these capacities it brought greater pressure to bear upon Leeds people. At the same time, residents had less in common with one another, as work-ways diverged and neighborhood life slowly died out.

The histories of private life between 1900 and 1950 are not necessarily bleak. People continued to inhabit and cultivate their own worlds of meaning, of birth and death, work and love. But the story of the larger landscape, the shared world of meaning, is one of erosion and decay: it is a story of houses abandoned, of farms burning down not to be rebuilt, of fields growing back to forest, of barn walls folding slowly in upon themselves and, amidst it all, of the town fathers battering down the town budget against the winds of need. The parade of institutions moved through this landscape with understandable uncertainty, unable to respond to the depth of need and unwilling, therefore, to acknowledge it. And indeed, not until Leeds discovered a new vision of its future would the needs be noticed, the changes acknowledged, and a new ground for community life cultivated.

A NEW VISION: 1950—1980

The changes which encouraged discovery and cultivation of a new ground for community life were a long time coming, lagging several decades behind new needs. But when the changes came, they came quickly: in the space of twenty years, a fresh crop of ideas, institutions and resources for Leeds sprang up on the new ground.

Looking back upon those two decades of change, Leeds people have different ideas about what precipitated the arrival of the new era. There were, of course, the odd coincidences of person, place, and possibility which conspire to create history. Still, the first factor was undoubtedly economic. During World War II farm prices soared, the supply of jobs in wartime industry exceeded the demand, and wages rose. Leeds residents who were not off fighting the war were home making money from it—and the money they made they could not easily spend, with goods being rationed and machinery monopolized for military production. When the war ended, townspeople put their savings to use, expanding their farm operations, purchasing household comforts. At the same time as economic conditions improved, a new generation emerged ready to take advantage of them. The soldiers

returning from Europe and the Pacific had seen a variety of human conditions and miseries and were not, as one veteran puts it, "quite so quick to look down their noses at others in their own town." They came back with new ways of seeing; and, more practically, they came back with new skills and resources, educational benefits and pensions at their disposal. Those who had stayed behind had been working in unusual places, in shipyards and wartime industries; they too had new skills and a broader horizon of expectation for themselves.

At the same time, the old power block of large farmers and town fathers was dying a natural death. The last representatives of Leeds' old families—Ralph Lothrop, Howard Lincoln, the Deane brothers, Frank Herrick, the Thomases, Bishops, Boothbys, and Parkers—had not borne children. When they died, their names and ways of life died with them. But other farm families, some longstanding in Leeds and some more recent, bore a new generation, and that new generation took advantage of its capital and of the available technology to make the transition from small-scale diversified crop farming to large-scale single crop agriculture. Unlike young people who had come of age in earlier, uneasier decades, this generation had a sense of economic hope, a willingness to break with old ways and risk their savings on something new—and, concomitantly, a new vision of what Leeds as a community could and should become.

The first, if not the most profound, harbinger of that new vision was the purchase of a town beach in 1949. At town meeting that year, in a move wholly uncharacteristic of the town's no-frills spending tradition, voters appropriated the grand sum of one thousand dollars for thirty-three acres of shoreline, field, and forest as a public recreation area along the edge of Androscoggin Lake. Leeds named the area Stinchfield Point, after its first white settlers—and that is about all the town did do for its beach. The acreage received little public attention and no more town money until 1981. And yet, although the purchase proved to be an incomplete thought, it did indicate a new way of thinking: it signaled the conception of Leeds as a residential community, a community in which leisure, rather than work, would be the common ground for meeting. For, as those who led the way toward funding this and other new public facilities recognized, the town's prosperity would depend increasingly upon its competitive appeal as a place to live.

A second major move made in the same years, just after the war's end, was the establishment of a town fire department. Until that time, fire fighting had been a somewhat haphazard affair in Leeds. Those who needed the help of hose and bucket had to call the selectmen first, to get their fire officially approved; the selectmen then had to call in the fire department of a neighboring town. Meanwhile, and more to the benefit of the burning building, neighbors could be counted on to come to the rescue. This approach saved some structures, in the days when neighbors worked at home: help was nearby if one needed it, and people knew one another's homes and habits well enough to spot suspicious smoke if one was out. Moreover, the state of the roads would have made a townwide fire department a seasonable service at best. With federal and state-sponsored road improvements in the 1930s,

with the trend toward work outside the home, and with the economic optimism of the late forties, however, Leeds finally saw fit to establish its own fire department. The idea took shape in many different minds, but its execution was largely the work of a single man, William Daly. A Detroit police officer, Daly moved to Leeds after being wounded in the line of duty, and he brought with him a strong belief in the importance of municipal services. He served as the town's fire chief for nearly twenty years, during which time the department grew from a trailer and water pump to a garage teeming with gleaming red trucks. Daly fought fires with much the same dedication that Doc Russell fought disease in Leeds: he would even spend his nights in the firehouse during wild winter storms, so as to be nearer his truck and quicker to the rescue should a fire break out. Daly was a great fighter, indeed—and not only of town fires but of town fathers. The selectmen appreciated the idea of better fire fighting; but they appreciated as well the virtues of an austere town budget. Daly took them on, challenging the views of that power block with his own contingent of supporters. As a result he managed to multiply fire department appropriations many times over in the thirty years of his administration.

Daly or no Daly, Leeds' fire department would have come about anyway, given the growing interest in municipal services and the economic climate of the time. But Daly made it happen much more quickly, by dedicating himself with single-minded passion to the task.

Another significant event of those post-war years was the construction of a single centralized school. Superintendent Hodges had been pushing for a central school since the thirties; but it was an idea whose time only came twenty years later, in 1952, as a result of several converging events. The "baby boom" in the wake of World War II created a need for new school space: in 1951, exactly six years after the war's end, Leeds had to turn its town hall into a classroom to ease overcrowding in other schoolhouses about town. Tared roads had begun to make the task of transporting students further from home a more manageable one. And the hopeful economic mood made the prospect of town indebtedness more bearable—while new sources for low-interest loans made it almost irresistible. In 1951 the State recognized Leeds as a "School District," enabling it to borrow state money for the construction of a central school if it did so within a year. At the same time the State established the Maine School Building Authority, which offered a second source of low-interest loans to the town.

While funds facilitated the decision, however, human beings finally had to make it—and here economics ended and the drama began. The superintending school committee had to hold a special town meeting to gain public approval of the idea, and they had to get the selectmen's permission to hold that meeting. One selectman, long opposed, had finally softened: his wife, a teacher, had done some long hard lobbying at home. "There was one other selectman remained opposed," recalls committee member Ocena Additon. "But he finally did say that if we got the other two to sign the meeting warrant, it'd go through." Selectman Guy Buckley signed first. By the time they got to selectman Lindley Parker's house, the hour

was close to midnight and the town father in bed—but Ocena said, “It is started, we should finish it.” So they woke Lindley up, got his signature, got the meeting, and, finally, got the centralized school building of their dreams.

The new school opened in the fall of 1953, with seven female teachers instructing nine classes in rooms along a single hallowed hall of learning. The town had voted to raise one thousand dollars for the salary of a “male Principal,” probably in the belief that a man could command greater authority than a woman and thus more effectively control a single building brimming with youth—a funny way of looking at things, if one considers that women had been keeping order in Leeds schoolhouses all by themselves for the past century without any other help at hand. At any rate, Leeds got its male principal—Donald Tripp—and its central school.

The new school is commonly regarded as a turning point in Leeds’ fiscal policy; with it, so the story goes, the town drifted from a low-tax budget into a reckless life of Big Spending. This perception is less than fair. Educational costs did increase: the appropriation for school maintenance, for instance, doubled between 1952 and 1962. The money going to pay teachers also went up—not because teachers were being paid more, but rather because there were more teachers to pay. In fact, Leeds teachers continued to receive substandard wages. A study of Androscoggin Valley towns published in 1964 indicates that Leeds elementary school teachers received an average annual salary of \$3,800—sixteen percent below the state average and thirty-three percent below the national average. Leeds secondary school teachers averaged \$4,700—eight percent less than the state average and twenty-two percent less than the national. The number of town dollars going to education increased in the years after centralization, but so did the number of dollars going to other appropriations. The percentage of the town dollar going to education actually decreased—from forty-eight percent in 1952 to forty-three percent a decade later.

Another of the changes heralding the new era—and undoubtedly one of the factors that did make it an era of big, or bigger, spending—took place at the heart of town life, the annual town meeting. In a special session in January of 1955, residents voted to break with two outworn traditions. First, they moved the annual meeting date from a Monday to a Saturday—a simple calender shift which re-enfranchised the rapidly growing number of wage-earning and commuting residents. Second, they decided to abandon voting by a show of hands and institute a secret, or “Australian,” ballot instead.

The secret ballot allowed townspeople to vote their conscience without worrying about the response of creditors, employers, or landlords sitting nearby. While the political autonomy of residents may have benefited from this change, however, it was not the motivating concern. With the increase in funding for municipal services, certain offices had quickly become well-paying jobs—and this in a region where jobs were not easy to find, much less lucrative ones. In 1951, for instance, the road commissioner earned nearly two thousand dollars on the job—a hefty

civic salary when one considers that the average individual income for Androscoggin County, an inflationary decade later, was only \$1,236. Moreover, the road commissioner paid out many thousands of dollars in wages to local laborers, which made the post politically attractive as well as lucrative. With the show-of-hands system, nominations for these posts had been made from the floor and were necessarily unlimited in number. As Warren Grant, then a member of the school committee, recalls, every man who wanted the post would bring in his friends and "the result would be about eight nominations, each with nine or ten votes." The Australian ballot required nominations prior to election day, and each nominee had to gather 100 signatures for his petition—a hefty obstacle unless one already had substantial popular support. The new system had one little kink in it, though. Ballots for town office were cast in the morning, and the ballot clerks then spent the afternoon counting them up instead of participating in the budget meeting. The clerks apparently did not mind, for the kink was only smoothed out 16 years later, when the townspeople voted to hold elections Friday afternoon and the budget meeting on Saturday afternoon.

The shift to secret ballot was more symbolic than practical in its significance. There were no major upheavals in the seats of power in town government—and Carl Geores, who was a newcomer to town in those years, offers at least one reason. The ballot handed to voters had the name of the power block's nominee printed on it, says Carl. The voter could cross out that name and write another in its place, of course—but people tended to go along with the official-looking suggestion, instead, and do what they had been "told."

Another significant change in the conduct of town life occurred in the same period, this time in the public handling of private affairs. In 1949, by state mandate, the town stopped publishing marriage and birth records. Prior to this, the "vital statistics" of a citizen's birth, marriage and death had been printed up at the end of each annual report—and in such a way as to reveal the legitimacy or illegitimacy of all children born in Leeds. If the mother was married, the report would read, "To the wife of Joe Public, a daughter . . ." If, on the other hand, the mother was single, the report would read, "To Miss Jane Q. Public, a daughter . . ." This approach suggested something about local attitudes toward women. The woman alone received the blame for an illegitimate birth—understandable, perhaps, since the town lacked legal proof of the father's identity. But the woman received no credit for a legitimate birth: only the husband was named! When the State put an end to these practices, however, it did so to protect the privacy of the child, not out of new-found respect for women. Marriage records, too, became private information at this time. As a result, an unmarried mother in Leeds today may bear the emotional and economic burdens of giving birth alone, but she need not endure the additional burden of public humiliation. By placing the person's privacy over the community's right to know, the new ruling marked a major step in the relationship between the citizen and the civic order—a step away from the intimacy which once had characterized life in Leeds, and toward a limitation of the town's jurisdiction over the behavior of its residents.

In a similar move, and in the same era, Leeds stopped publishing the names of those who received poor relief. The State had long kept the names of its welfare recipients private; Leeds finally volunteered to do the same, starting in 1952. This decision did not go down easily with all the townspeople. A decade later an article appeared on the town warrant asking "to see if the town will vote to instruct the Selectmen to report the names of all persons receiving Public Welfare." The article ran in '62, '63 and '64, each time without success. In two of those three years another article, probably drafted by the same hand, also called for a return to the publication of all vital statistics. Apparently not everyone in Leeds had been converted to the view that individual privacy takes priority over the community's right to know. Still, the articles were defeated, and the names of newlyweds, childbearers, and welfare recipients remained locked away from the public eye—at least in theory. As one person who received public assistance from Leeds in the 1950s recalls, the practice was something else. "You got five or six people in the town office who know," he explains, "and they are related to half the town. So it's against the law. But it's also public knowledge." As long as the town provided tax dollars for poor relief, taxpayers would want to know just who was costing them money. And as long as Leeds remained a close-knit community of kin, they would have their ways of finding out.

Between 1947 and 1955, then, a series of significant changes swept the public world of Leeds. The town had begun to plot out its future as a residential community, a community united by leisure, a community envisioned as a good place to live. Local taxpayers voted large sums of money to provide themselves with a public recreation area, fire department, and centralized school. And the townspeople also began to dismantle the apparatus by which the old community of values had enforced itself: they moved town meeting to Saturdays and introduced a secret ballot, thus re-enfranchising vast portions of the population; they stopped publishing birth, marriage, and poor relief data in the town report, a move which stressed the rights of the individual over the community.

Residents had begun to reshape their town as a residential community, with a primary value placed upon individual privacy. Still, however, they lacked a compelling moral vision to guide them in matters of public life—and especially in the matter of response to human need. When a new vision did appear, the inspiration did not come from the local government. It did not come from the State or Federal government. It came from a voluntary association spawned in the same decade: the Leeds Community Church.



Edson Waite had always been a public dreamer, a man whose dreams, although not always realized by himself, kept coming true for Leeds. He dreamed of paving the Sunken Road. He dreamed of restoring the town's cemeteries. He dreamed of a town beach. He dreamed of a regional medical center. (And he

dreamed, a decade before his death in 1983, of updating the Leeds town history.) In the 1940s he dreamed of a community church—and when in 1950 he had to shop around for a stranger to preside as pastor at his mother's funeral, Edson decided that the time had come to make that dream a reality. He found one hundred townspeople who, like him, were interested in getting a minister in Leeds to attend to pastoral needs; next, he organized a petition drive to secure their support and a committee to represent them. The committee then took that petition to the Interdenominational Commission of Maine, which pointed them in the direction of the Presbyterians. Presbyterianism had never before set foot on Leeds soil: indeed, the United Presbyterian Church of the USA had only come to Maine for the first time the decade before. But the Presbyterians had bills of the right denomination and a manifest willingness to invest them in the souls of Leeds folk. In the spring of 1952 Carl Geores, a graduating senior from Princeton Theological Seminary, arrived in Leeds to audition for the job of its new minister; that summer the newly ordained Reverend Geores and his wife Melva moved to Leeds to start a church.

The three surviving members of the Universalist Church sold the new congregation their building for one dollar, and the two remaining members of the Baptist Church next door soon followed suit. The Ladies' Circle of the Universalist Church changed allegiances as easily as their building: they became the Women's Association of the Leeds Community Church, and their first act was to put on a church fund raising supper the following fall. Ruth Alden was an active member of the Circle at the time; as she remembers, that first supper was truly challenging. "We had no electricity, we had no kitchen, we had no dishes, we had no chairs," she recalls. So they solicited food, already cooked, and borrowed china and chairs from the Grange hall down the hill. But the lack of lights could not be helped. When dinner was finished and darkness had fallen, they left the church with all the dirty dishes in it, to come back the next day and carry the dishes down to the Grange hall, where they washed them with water heated on the Lodge's wooden stove.

All this tromping up and down Meeting House Hill had a precedent, of course. Leeds' first grangers of 1885 had borrowed the Universalist building for their first meetings—just as now the new church borrowed Grange hall facilities for its first rites. And indeed, these mutual courtesies, sixty-seven years apart, marked a kind of changing of the social guard in town. For just as the Grange had replaced local churches at the beginning of the century as the center of public life, so now the new church would eclipse and eventually extinguish the light of the Leeds Grange.

During its first decade the Community Church members worked to develop the basic equipment of congregational life: repairing and getting electricity into the church buildings, establishing a choir and Sunday School, gathering a flock. In ten years church membership doubled, from the founding 55 to 119. By 1963 the Sunday School alone served 99 children. And, whether they were members or not, townspeople soon began turning to Carl Geores to 'marry and bury' them. Thus

Edson Waite's dream of a minister to meet the pastoral needs of the community quickly came true.

But, as it turned out, the minister had a vision too—a vision of a church as something more than a marrying, burying institution. Carl Geores conceived of a congregation as a “servant church,” serving non-members as well as believers, with all its members (not just its minister) doing the serving. Christianity had a public mission, he felt; it called upon its faithful to share their gifts with their community. The concept of a church as having a mission in the world around it was not new to Leeds: in 1837, the Universalist Society had declared its object to be the “promotion of religion and morality among ourselves and our fellow men.” Whereas that society and others of its era had viewed their task in the surrounding community as moral in nature, however, Geores focused on the material needs of non-members. He was concerned with lifting up living standards as well as moral standards. Equipped with this vision, the new minister started an awakening in Leeds—an awakening to the needs of others in the town, and an awakening to one's own ability to do something to meet those needs.

Carl's conversion technique was as simple as it was successful. He took church members on “rides,” showing them hidden sides of their township, and hidden sores along it—the insides of shacks, the insides of lives. David Trider began a longstanding commitment to serving others by going on such a ride in the early '60s. “Carl planted the seed,” he explains. “He says, ‘Come for a ride with me.’ Took me to places and made me see things I'd always driven by—dirt floors and families surviving on biscuits.”

Having planted that seed, Carl quickly watered it. He told David about a state-operated Surplus Food Program. The State would donate the food, but the town had to provide funding to transport it from Portland to Leeds and to pay for its storage. Having confronted Leeds poverty, David and his wife Nancy now encountered the politics of poor relief. Their efforts to raise money from the town put them in direct conflict with the town fathers and, as David says, “gave us a lot more insight into what people are up against.” The first year the selectmen refused to put the article on the town meeting warrant. “There's no poor here,” they told David, and added, “If you treat these people nice, they'll stay.” The second year, the article found its way onto the warrant and into the meeting, but the townspeople voted it down as “too costly.” Following this defeat, David went to the state capitol of Augusta, where, in a kindly twist of fate, he found himself facing an old schoolmate across the state office desk. Together they devised a more workable plan: the Triders would cut down the cost to the town by storing the food in their own home and distributing it themselves. When town meeting came around again, the taxpayers voted to raise five hundred dollars for transportation costs. David and Nancy then went door to door to locate eligible recipients and, by 1964, the Surplus Food Program was in full swing. For the next five years the

Triders provided free cheese, butter, meat, cornmeal, and an occasional box of raisins to about fifty families. Their clientele comprised, in David's estimate, one sixth of the town population at that time.

The Surplus Food Program was replaced by Food Stamps in 1969, a federally mandated and funded service which was, in its first phase, administered by the town officers. Outreach workers from the Community Action Program (again, a federal effort) certified recipients every six months; the town government then handed out the money to purchase their stamps. This set-up, as former CAP worker Bruce Smith recalls, was highly unpopular with recipients after the free food and fairly simple distribution procedures of the Surplus Food Program. Food Stamps had one clearly positive effect, however. Its regulations required the town to keep an office open part of every weekday, and so, for the first time in its history, Leeds installed a town clerk in the antique town house on Route 106, which had served mainly as the home of town meeting in its long life. With this, town government moved out of the homes of selectmen and onto more public ground. (In 1965, town meeting itself had shifted from the town house to the Leeds elementary school, to accommodate the expanding population of participating voters.) In later years Food Stamps were mailed directly to recipients—but the town kept its office open and its clerk in place, to handle the ever-burgeoning number of licenses, forms and fees required for every act of daily life in Leeds.

These steps in the provision of food to the hungry followed a pattern which would reappear time and again in the introduction of new social services to Leeds. First Carl Geores showed church members a need in their community and identified extra-local resources to meet that need. Next church members took creative advantage of those resources, circumventing the need for local funding and, implicitly, for local approval. In time, the service provided became a formal function of State or Federal government, bypassing local input—whether from government or church—together.

The same pattern marked the introduction of public housing assistance into Leeds. In 1963, the intrepid minister took David Trider and church deacon Charlie Barker on another ride: this time they visited homes lacking lights or floors, wind-proof walls or sound chimneys. Carl's passengers, as it happened, had just the skills to meet the needs they saw: David was an electrician by trade and Charlie the head of a construction company. The two volunteered their expertise, labor and time, and Carl dug up money for supplies from wealthier Presbyterian congregations outside of Maine. The result was a chimney in one home, electricity in another, and insulation in a third.

In 1967 another church member, Charlie Woodward, went for a ride—this time alone. "Carl sent me to pick up some kids for Sunday School," he recalls:

and I looked in there and my God this was a house with a dirt floor. I thought that had gone out in 1910, and here it was 1967. Carl says, "We ought to do something, Charlie." And I says, "Jesus, I guess we ought." Then Carl says, "Well, they got this program at Farmer's Home Administration. Why don't you look into it?"

The program, a Great Society effort by the Johnson administration, had two simple principles: first, it provided about a dozen low-income families with low-interest loans to build houses; second, it asked the families to contract with one another to do the labor. The men in each family agreed to put in so many hours of labor to build the individual houses; if they failed to put in those hours, they had to pay the cash equivalent of the unexpended labor. "Self-Help Housing," as it was called, was something like a barn-raising of old, only translated into the terms of modern life: a formal contract between persons in need replaced an informal commitment between neighbors, and Farmer's Home Administration loans provided the necessary capital for buying materials in a cash economy.

The contract also presented some problems peculiar to modern life. It expected participants to work every night except weekends, and many of these men, unlike barnraisers of old, had full-time jobs away from home, leaving them with little energy for working late into the night. The loans also presented problems: in the first year, the Farmer's Home Administration offered no interest credit, making it difficult for participants to keep up with their payments. Despite the snags, however, the two housing projects attempted in Leeds eventually resulted in new homes for 110 people, over ten percent of the town's population at the time. While Self-Help Housing had previously appeared in other rural regions of the country, Leeds was the first community in the northeast to start one—an achievement which brought LBJ's secretary of Agriculture Orville Freeman, Orville's wife, and an entourage of reporters to town in 1968. The visit seems to have made little impression on anyone except Charlie Woodward, who had what he terms "the dubious honor" of losing a day's farm work to show them around, and Ma Higgins, who remembers feeding them dinner at her Sunnyside Cafe on Route 201. While federal funds had slowly found a welcome in Leeds, federal officials remained as suspect as ever.

The Freeman visit brought Leeds national press coverage, but no additional aid. After 1968, the FHA refused to give the town any more loans—the reason being, in the opinion of one project worker, the late payments made in that first year. And yet, while Self-Help Housing, like the Surplus Food Program, was only an temporary solution, it did provide a long-lasting organizational and funding model for community services. In order to comply with FHA regulations, Charlie Woodward and others created the Leeds Improvement Organization, a non-profit agency to administer the funds and enforce the contracts. When Self-Help Housing died, the Leeds Improvement Organization lived on and, under the stewardship of Bruce Smith, branched out into the improvement not only of houses but of employ-

ment opportunities and public facilities for Leeds people. To help pay for its efforts, the LIO tapped into a broad array of state and federal funds. Its most glittering achievement was a \$150,000 grant from HUD for housing improvements in southeast and west Leeds. The LIO also designed employment programs for two especially unemployable populations—the very young and the very old. Its Summer Youth Employment Program used CETA funding to put teenagers to work building a public garden, clearing roadside trash, and rehabilitating the town beach, which had suffered from a tradition of civic neglect since its purchase in 1949. A Senior Community Service Project, still in operation in the '80s, put retired carpenters and laborers to work repairing the houses of elderly and poverty-stricken persons in the area. Like so many of the community programs appearing in Leeds in the '60s and '70s, the Senior Community Service Project put two modern needs together. On the one hand, for the elderly workers, there was the need to do something constructive, a need once met by lifelong participation in a family farm which never "retired" you; on the other hand, for the persons they helped, there was the need for a little special assistance around the house, assistance once provided by neighbors or family. Another LIO program, Winter Watch, filled a gap left by the decline of intimacy among neighbors in Leeds. It hired townspeople to call or visit shut-ins regularly in the winter, to check on their health and bring needed supplies or help. In both cases, extralocal funding helped pay the way.

The LIO used a modern organizational structure to respond to needs created by massive shifts in the way of life in Leeds. The same organizational structure, and much the same kind of service, now characterizes another local organization with its headquarters in Leeds: the Rural Community Action Ministry. Founded in 1970 by a group of pastors from fifteen churches in the region, and headquartered in the back rooms of the Leeds Community Church, RCAM has matched outside funding with local knowledge to offer services once performed by family members, neighbors or the town government. Its staff and volunteers help with housing repairs, shelter burned-out families in an emergency trailer, provide seed, tools, and encouragement to would-be gardeners, and run a barter exchange and a cottage industry. Each program provides a skill once learned or a hand once lent within the circle of family and neighborhood.

Church members did not limit their community involvement to housing and food, however; they put themselves to work in the areas of education and health care as well. In the centralized school as in the one-room schoolhouses of old, education began at first grade. During the '60s, Leeds and many other communities across America began to consider extending education downward, to kindergarten. The school superintendent encouraged the expansion in his annual reports. Still, it was the Leeds Community Church, not the town government or school system, which took the first step. Anna Bryant Smith, a member of the Leeds congregation, and Anne Bengston Clarke, a member of First Presbyterian Church in Greenwich, Connecticut, designed and opened a pre-school program for Leeds

children in the church vestry. Funds came from several sources: from the Leeds and Greenwich churches and from CETA, which paid for a teacher's aide. When, after a few years, Head Start took over, the program moved to the central school and expanded to include medical care along with education—but it accepted only low-income children as students, a regulation which proved to be a point of difficulty for middle-class families in a town that had no other preschool facilities at all. Head Start lasted a single year; shortly after it packed up and departed, the school system finally instituted its own kindergarten. Again, the church program had been only a temporary solution. Yet, as Anna Smith says, it was the church that first stepped in "where there was a gap between the government and the need." And she also points out that this first step is part of a tradition in local education, for the churches had done precisely that in the days before Maine became a state, by founding and supporting schools in communities throughout the area.

Because so many of these programs are now government services rather than church works, it is hard to remember that they were all offspring of the Leeds Community Church. But so they all were, offspring born from the values and visions of that church in the '60s and '70s. David Trider, Charlie Barker and Charlie Woodward each draw a direct connection between the church and the far-reaching transformation of community service in Leeds. Trider and Woodward describe Carl Geores as a farmer of new ideas. "Carl planted the seed," in Trider's fine image. Woodward expands the same metaphor slightly, saying, "Carl is an idea-maker. He plants ideas in people's heads." Charlie Barker chooses a different but equally organic image. "Carl's biggest contribution," he says, "has been creating a climate" in which people could see and act newly.

Creating a new climate and planting new ideas were risky and difficult challenges for young "farmer" Geores, of course. In its early days, as now, the congregation was not of a single mind about the proper relationship between church and community. There was, as Carl puts it, "a great deal of heat, as well as light." Members who felt deeply opposed to the nature and extent of church activities in the community registered their opposition by formally leaving the church; others more quietly stopped attending services. But the bulk of the congregation stayed on, either converting to Carl's way of looking at things or committed to expressing differences of opinion from inside rather than outside the congregation. To this day, members occupy a remarkably broad spectrum of positions on the relationship between a church and the needs of its community, with each person seeing things in a slightly different way, lending support to some projects and strongly opposing others. Indeed, rather than rallying people around one unyielding idea or world view, the church has provided a meeting ground for many different views and for the discussion of deeply clashing ideas about the nature of Christian service in the solving of social problems. "During the Vietnam War," Charlie Woodward recalls, "we had some real knock-down drag-out fights at the Bible study meetings. But we've been able to do that and walk away friendly. Ideas in the church are not stifled. You may not be allowed to do 'em—but you're allowed to voice 'em."

The church has been a seedbed for ideas about community life far beyond church walls; it has also cultivated the leadership to carry out those ideas. Most, if not all, of Leeds' civic leaders in the last few decades learned their "trade" at the Leeds Community Church: its pulpit was their first podium, its congregation their first audience, one of its church groups their first (inevitably rude) awakening to committee work and politics. Charlie Woodward, who had by 1981 served as president of the Leeds Improvement Organization and the Regional Medical Center and been a trustee or committee member of many other regional groups working for education and medical care, unconditionally credits the church with his career in community leadership. It gave him the personal commitment to serve God, which led to ideas about serving others; it taught him to speak in public about those ideas; and it gave him a tool for their implementation—the infamous Presbyterian committee system. "The church is the school of leadership around here, not the school system," he concludes—and indeed, he slips into calling the church "the school" again and again in the course of conversation about his civic involvements.

Committees and commitments are hardly an exclusive trait of the Leeds church or of the Leeds community. Experience on committees can be attained almost anywhere—and indeed can hardly be avoided in this bureaucratic age. Likewise, the personal commitment of which Charlie Woodward speaks is not, as he says, "just Carl's way; it is the Christian way." Yet few towns today produce the quality or quantity of leadership found in the little town of Leeds—an observation made not only by proud insiders but by puzzled outsiders. "I go to meetings at Medical Care Development in Augusta," says Woodward, "and there are thirteen medical centers from southcentral Maine represented on the board. And the director says, 'Would you please explain to the board, Charlie, why it is so easy for you to get board members in Leeds and they have so much trouble finding people elsewhere?'" Woodward's answer is simple: "It's our local leadership school—the church."

His answer is perhaps too simple. Charlie Barker, another community leader and church member whose many acts of service include ten years as chair of the local school board, also credits the church with educating him to serve; and he also believes that Leeds stands out from neighboring towns as a community of extraordinary leadership. "You watch Turner, you watch Greene, and we aren't the same type of community," he says. But the biggest difference, in Charlie Barker's experience, is that Leeds lacks a nucleus of power: "There is no in-group."

Once upon a time Leeds had an "in-group," of course. Prior to the establishment of the Leeds Community Church in 1952, there was only one way to wield power and effect change in Leeds—and that was by fitting into or fighting, usually unsuccessfully, the local government. In the years just before 1952, the power block of large farmers and town fathers had been weakened by many changes. The large farmers had lost their economic control over townspeople with the opening of other sources of employment; the town fathers found themselves increasingly

hemmed in by extralocal regulations and town meeting reforms. The new church in town accelerated this breakdown of local power lines in two crucial ways; it provided a compelling new creed for community service, and it by-passed local government altogether in its use of extralocal monies. And so it might be said that Leeds has no power block now in part because of the presence of its church.

Indeed, if there has been a controlling center for community life in the last few decades, it has been the church itself. Leeds has few residents who have not had to pass through the church doors for some reason or another. Yet it has also been a remarkably spacious and flexible community center. Between the activities of its elders, deacons, women's association, pastor, interdenominational organizations and many temporary social service projects, the Leeds Community Church has become a "house with many mansions." While all under one roof, its "mansions" can be inhabited fairly independently. This structure allows many conflicting social philosophies to coexist without fatal collision, and it enables Leeds residents to work where they feel most useful and most comfortable. One local couple values a "traditional church mission" but disagrees with "social-action type ministry." So they attend worship services, women's association meetings, and church suppers, and stay away from other activities. Another local resident, born and raised a "home Baptist," feels at doctrinal odds with the church preachings and at political odds with its social teachings. She neither belongs to the church nor attends its services. And yet she is in many ways a main pillar of the building, for she spends at least twenty hours a week doing volunteer work through the women's association, work which raises money for every aspect of the church's life. Since the early '70s Leeds has also boasted a growing number of young professionals. Seldom native to Maine, of diverse religious background and now for the most part atheists or agnostics, they tend to have little patience for the Christological content of the local church teachings and do not attend church services. But they agree with the social philosophy of the church and quickly find their way onto church based committees and boards. As Charlie Woodward says, "Any and everybody in the community comes into contact with that church one way or another. Even if they hate it, they come into contact with it, and it rubs something off on them."

That "something" might be called a new sense of community. In the past three decades, the modes of public life in Leeds have changed profoundly indeed. Certain senses of community have been lost in the process. The town can no longer define itself as a group of people bound together by a common kind of work. Nor can it define itself as a clear community of values; for it is no longer able, as in its isolation of old, to enforce a single code of morality. But other senses of community are constantly being discovered—in the very diversity of gifts to be shared, dreams to be aired, and needs to be met.



Were Leeds to go on parade today, its gathered spectacle would little resemble the parade of 1901. Gone would be the horse-drawn carriages carrying a few clear symbols of local authority: the town fathers, the large farmers, the leaders of the Grange. Instead, many motorized floats would speak strongly of diversity, of the grand spectrum of groups, committees, agencies, and municipal services adorning one tiny town. There would be the Leeds Improvement Organization, the Rural Community Action Ministry, and the many "mansions" of the Leeds Community Church: the board of deacons, the women's association, the peacemaking group, the choir. There would be the staff and trustees of the Regional Medical Center and, of course, the bright red pride of the volunteer fire department. The town would need not one but several cars to carry its local government: for the school board, planning board and town clerk should all ride, along with the traditional selectmen. And the Federal government, once so simply celebrated by the figures of "Liberty" and "the Armed Forces," would probably not be represented at all—not because it is absent from Leeds today, but because it is all too present, an invisible force of funding and regulations felt by all, loved by none.

As this imagined parade suggests, there are many arenas for community activity in current-day Leeds, but few clear centers of community authority. Town and school administration have become big business, determined in large part by extralocal rules and regulations beyond the ken or control of the taxpayer, and often beyond the grasp of local administrators themselves. The once-powerful Grange is gone; and the Community Church which now serves as Leeds' social center has not concentrated local authority but diffused it, freeing residents to contribute to their town in many different ways.

Freedom, of course, breeds frustration. The very people enabled to act by the breakdown of local authority are ambivalent about their freedom, wishing quite naturally for the leverage to make others share their way of life. A man who has helped provide low-income housing and medical care finds himself wishing, as a result of his experiences, that "families would take care of their own"—a phrase once used to justify civic neglect of the poor. A man who has helped enfranchise and employ the marginal members of the town mourns the loss of "a sense of community"—a sense which worked, in earlier years, to keep those who did not "fit" outside the community altogether. A man who has worked hard for the expansion of educational opportunities in Leeds laments the intrusion of "too many ideas" into a once much simpler way of seeing. A man who has led the Maine dairy farmers' fight for government price controls on milk mourns the loss of free enterprise, insisting that government assistance has destroyed the work ethic.

Laments like these might be construed as a call to return to the old ways of doing. When voiced by the very persons who have helped change Leeds so much, they might even be construed as poorly disguised regrets and misgivings, vindicating the past, condemning the present.

And yet, for Leeds, there really is no choice between the past and the present, between the Eden remembered and the Exile now felt. Like other communities, Leeds has been forced by time and human nature to change. In moving from old to new ground, townspeople carry along keen memories of what they have lost. But there is no returning to that "good old" ground. There are only further choices to be faced, about ways in which to cultivate the new.

Leeds cannot erase the tar roads that line its face, any more than Eve could return the apple, unbitten, to its bough.

Leeds cannot ban telephone lines and electric cables, and thereby retrieve its old self.

For it is not the wires connecting the town to the larger world that contain change, but the minds of the townspeople themselves. They have come to see their world, their neighbors, themselves anew.

And in this, as in 1901, there is much to celebrate. 🌳🌳🌳

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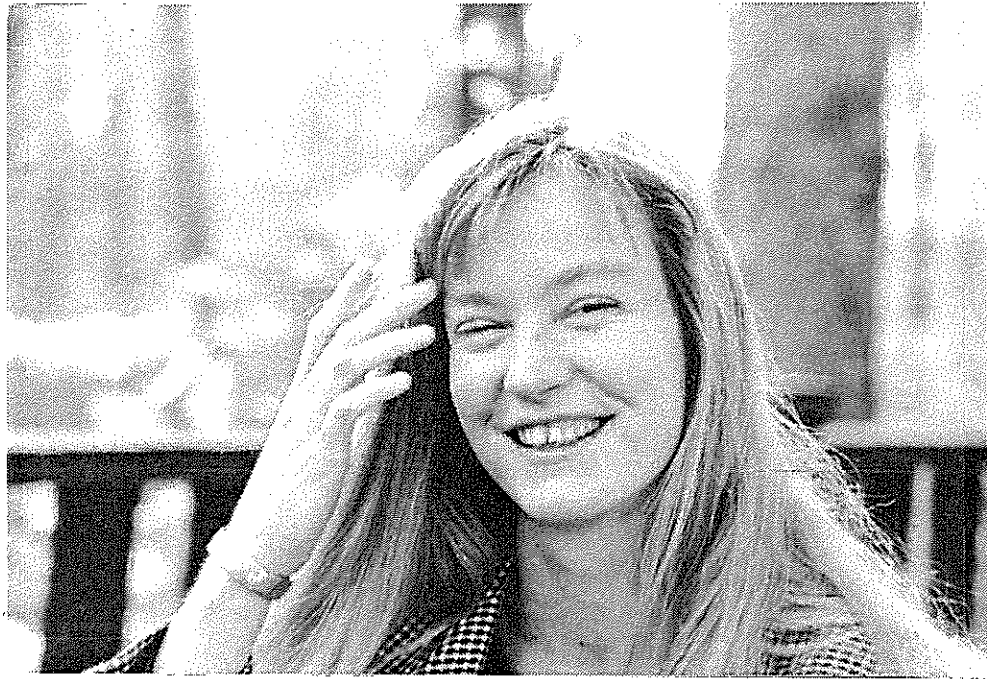
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